The Independent

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Letters from the Editors

Dear readers,

With my time at Rollins ending, I am so proud to leave my mark on this campus here in The Independent. It feels uncanny that the magazine I joined freshman year would lead me here to be the Editor-in-Chief. I believe that writing can allow us to transfigure our ways of thinking and being even for a moment. As the state of the world and specifically this nation becomes grimmer each day, writing is a fundamental right and expression of human existence. It connects us to times and places forgotten and things yet to be found. I believe this publication is a testimony to the beauty of writing and more largely to the beauty of humanity.

From the brilliant voices that we are publishing to the detailed eyes of the editors to the imaginative hands of the illustrators and designers, I had a team that followed a vision I had for this publication, and I could not be more excited to show Rollins the outcome of our efforts. We have pushed to transform this publication and uplift it into something bigger than ourselves.

Proudly, in my time as Editor-in-Chief, we have doubled the number of submissions from the student community since last year's numbers and reached the maximum number of pages since 2018. Although I may have only been the Editor-in-Chief once, I am grateful for the honor to showcase Rollins' talents as we continue our commitments to diversity, free expression, creativity, and social justice.

Just within this issue, our contributors covered a range of topics like abortion rights, race, Palestine, death, mental health, and so much more. Their cultures, interests, histories, loves, lives, and losses are all beautifully contained within this singular publication documenting our unique time altogether at Rollins. I am so proud to carry the legacy of this magazine forward and I look forward to the bright future it holds.

Mary Rust
Editor-in-Chief

Dear readers,

I am Gabriela Estrada, I'm a sophomore at Rollins and this year I got the wonderful opportunity to serve as The Independent's Chief Creative Officer. Alongside Mary, we have achieved the goals that we had invision for this year to a great extent. I am so proud of this issue and of all the hard work we have made throughout this year.

I would like to thank everyone who has been part of this process, and seeing the finished product is a very rewarding feeling. I am so proud of us. I feel like this issue is powerful and I am proud of serving as a source to bring these wonderful voices alive.

To Mary, thank you for being the best partner, I wish you the best on what the future might bring, and I hope - and I am sure - that this magazine will hold a bright future and I promise to keep working for that. Thank you to Student Media, to our director Greg Golden, and to everyone that has plant their seed into this publication, your contribution means everything, and I am sure we will keep on being a great publisher for voices at Rollins, I hope you enjoy it!

Gabriela Estrada
Chief Creative Officer

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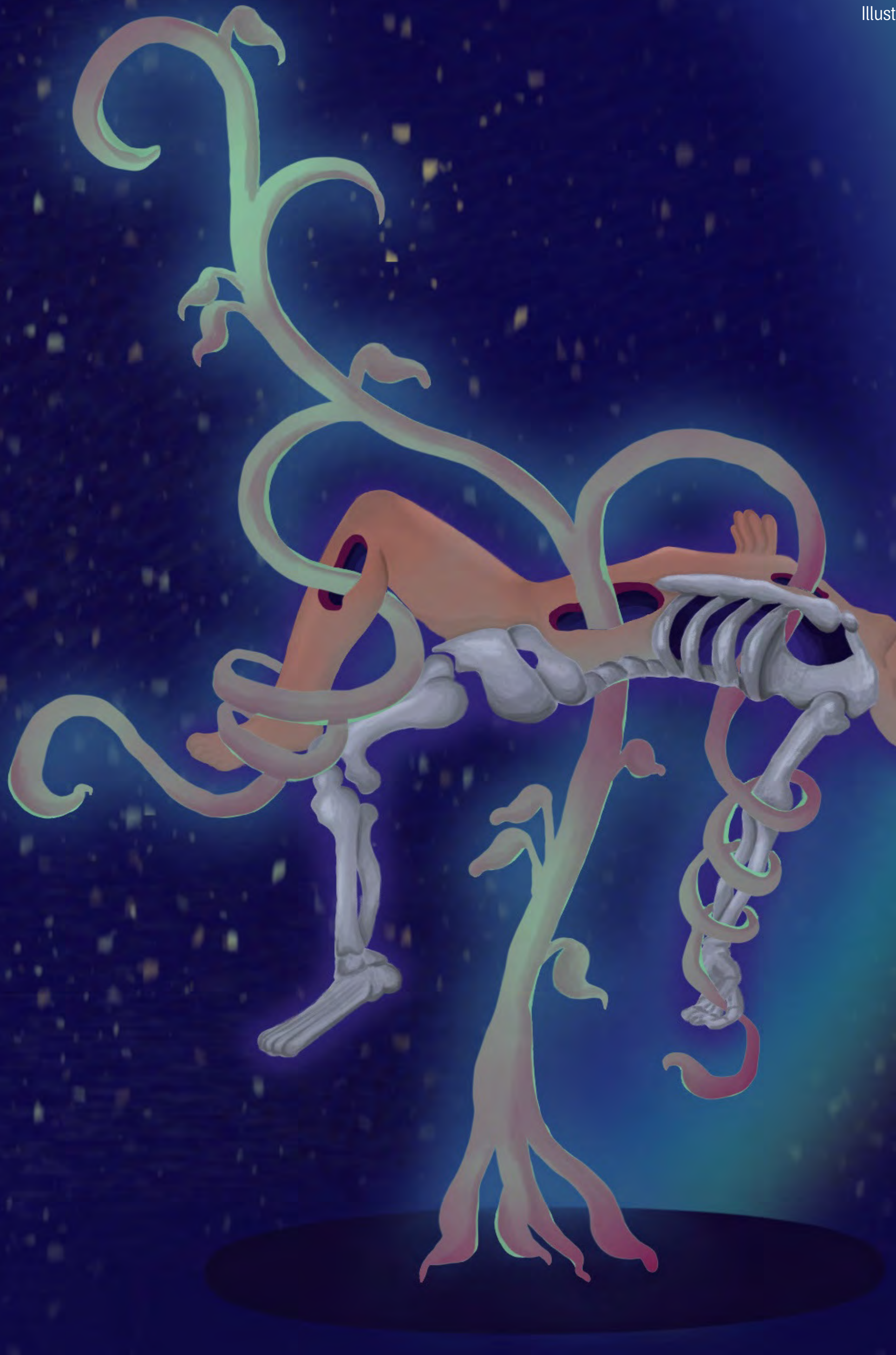
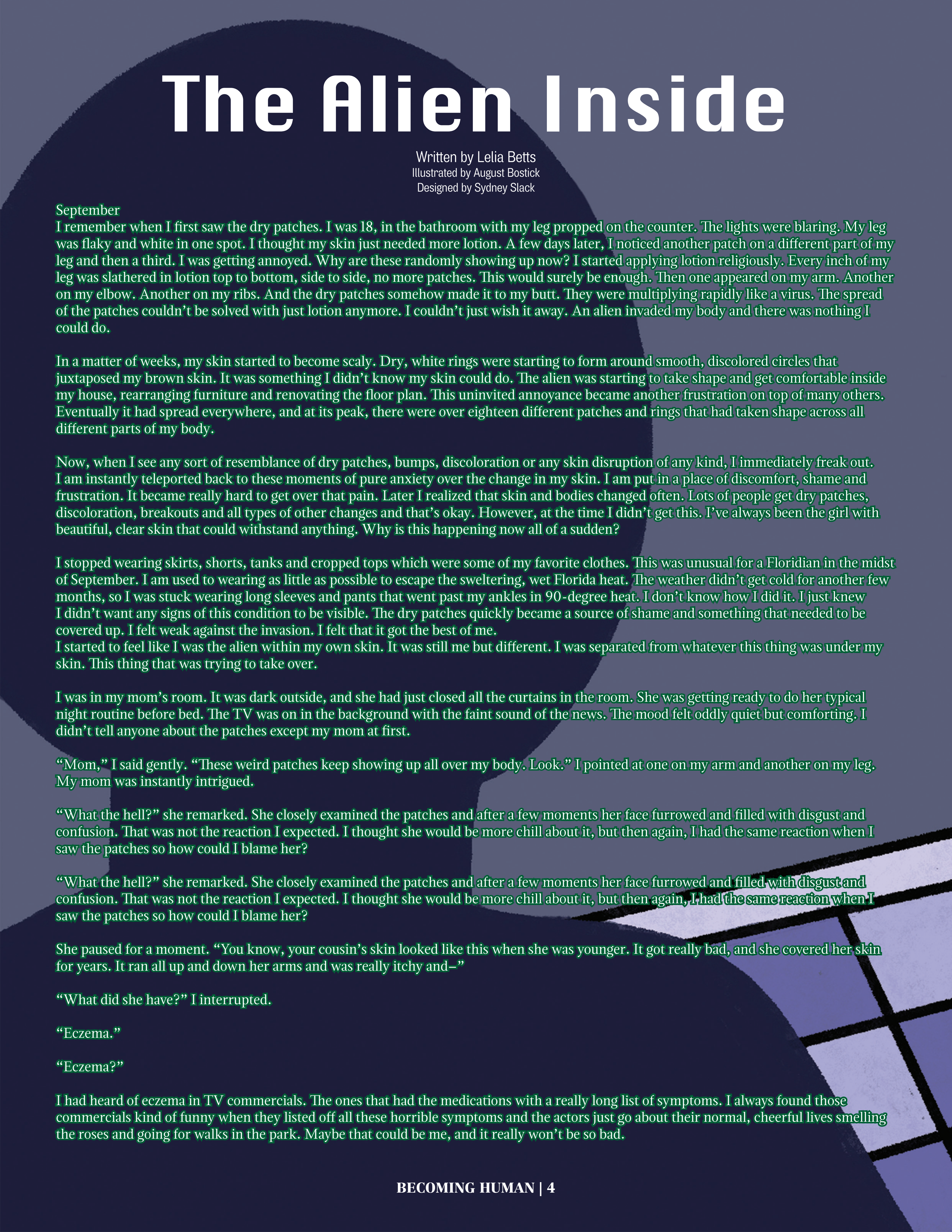
BECOMING *Human*

Illustrated by Leo OBrien





The Alien Inside

Written by Lelia Betts
Illustrated by August Bostick
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September
I remember when I first saw the dry patches. I was 18, in the bathroom with my leg propped on the counter. The lights were blaring. My leg was flaky and white in one spot. I thought my skin just needed more lotion. A few days later, I noticed another patch on a different part of my leg and then a third. I was getting annoyed. Why are these randomly showing up now? I started applying lotion religiously. Every inch of my leg was slathered in lotion top to bottom, side to side, no more patches. This would surely be enough. Then one appeared on my arm. Another on my elbow. Another on my ribs. And the dry patches somehow made it to my butt. They were multiplying rapidly like a virus. The spread of the patches couldn't be solved with just lotion anymore. I couldn't just wish it away. An alien invaded my body and there was nothing I could do.

In a matter of weeks, my skin started to become scaly. Dry, white rings were starting to form around smooth, discolored circles that juxtaposed my brown skin. It was something I didn't know my skin could do. The alien was starting to take shape and get comfortable inside my house, rearranging furniture and renovating the floor plan. This uninvited annoyance became another frustration on top of many others. Eventually it had spread everywhere, and at its peak, there were over eighteen different patches and rings that had taken shape across all different parts of my body.

Now, when I see any sort of resemblance of dry patches, bumps, discoloration or any skin disruption of any kind, I immediately freak out. I am instantly teleported back to these moments of pure anxiety over the change in my skin. I am put in a place of discomfort, shame and frustration. It became really hard to get over that pain. Later I realized that skin and bodies changed often. Lots of people get dry patches, discoloration, breakouts and all types of other changes and that's okay. However, at the time I didn't get this. I've always been the girl with beautiful, clear skin that could withstand anything. Why is this happening now all of a sudden?

I stopped wearing skirts, shorts, tanks and cropped tops which were some of my favorite clothes. This was unusual for a Floridian in the midst of September. I am used to wearing as little as possible to escape the sweltering, wet Florida heat. The weather didn't get cold for another few months, so I was stuck wearing long sleeves and pants that went past my ankles in 90-degree heat. I don't know how I did it. I just knew I didn't want any signs of this condition to be visible. The dry patches quickly became a source of shame and something that needed to be covered up. I felt weak against the invasion. I felt that it got the best of me.
I started to feel like I was the alien within my own skin. It was still me but different. I was separated from whatever this thing was under my skin. This thing that was trying to take over.

I was in my mom's room. It was dark outside, and she had just closed all the curtains in the room. She was getting ready to do her typical night routine before bed. The TV was on in the background with the faint sound of the news. The mood felt oddly quiet but comforting. I didn't tell anyone about the patches except my mom at first.

"Mom," I said gently. "These weird patches keep showing up all over my body. Look." I pointed at one on my arm and another on my leg. My mom was instantly intrigued.

"What the hell?" she remarked. She closely examined the patches and after a few moments her face furrowed and filled with disgust and confusion. That was not the reaction I expected. I thought she would be more chill about it, but then again, I had the same reaction when I saw the patches so how could I blame her?

"What the hell?" she remarked. She closely examined the patches and after a few moments her face furrowed and filled with disgust and confusion. That was not the reaction I expected. I thought she would be more chill about it, but then again, I had the same reaction when I saw the patches so how could I blame her?

She paused for a moment. "You know, your cousin's skin looked like this when she was younger. It got really bad, and she covered her skin for years. It ran all up and down her arms and was really itchy and–"

"What did she have?" I interrupted.

"Eczema."

"Eczema?"

I had heard of eczema in TV commercials. The ones that had the medications with a really long list of symptoms. I always found those commercials kind of funny when they listed off all these horrible symptoms and the actors just go about their normal, cheerful lives smelling the roses and going for walks in the park. Maybe that could be me, and it really won't be so bad.

I googled eczema right then and there in front of my mom to confirm what I had been thinking. Eczema is an inflammatory skin condition that causes dry, itchy skin, rashes, patches, blisters and skin infections. I wholeheartedly believe that's what I had. I accepted it as fact, and this was now something I had to live with.

Despite all of this, my mom was very supportive. Weirded out and concerned, but supportive. "You're seeing your new doctor soon. We'll ask her about it then and see what she says." She reassured me.

October
I had my first consultation with Dr. K, my new primary doctor. The nurse kindly led my mom and I to the patient room. It smelled like a typical doctor's office with the vague scent of sweet lemon mixed with a strangeness that burned my nose hair. I was asked a few questions about my medical history by the nurse before she left and thus began our wait for Dr. K.

I didn't know what to expect from the doctor. Would she be boisterous and funny like my last primary doctor? Or would she be more soft spoken? Would she have a diagnosis for me? Or would these strange patches continue to be a mystery?

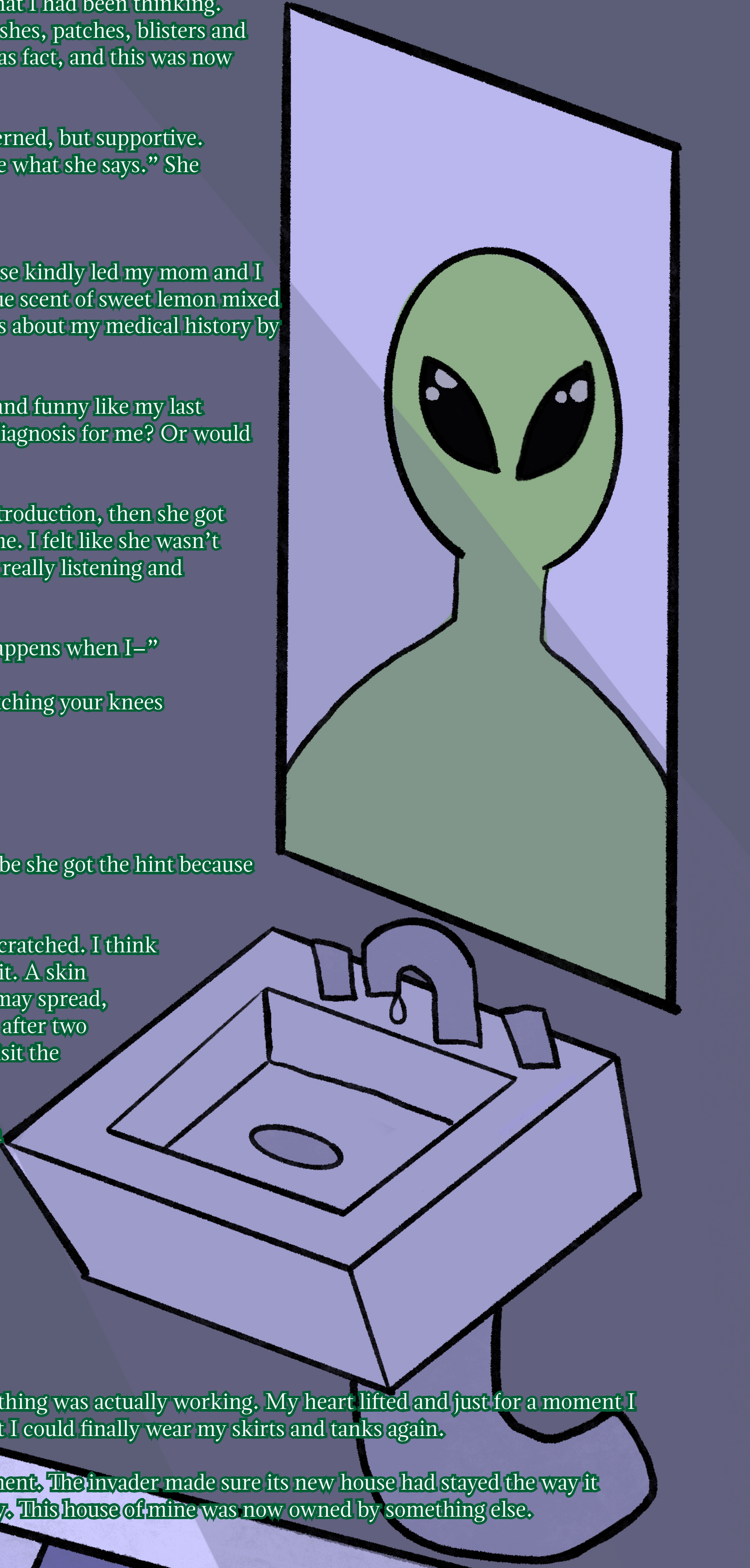
After much anticipation she finally arrives with haste. We had a brief introduction, then she got straight to the point. Very nice woman, but she seemed crunched for time. I felt like she wasn't listening to all my concerns and ailments. She was nodding, but was she really listening and understanding?

"I've also been having this shooting pain in my knees when I squat. It happens when I–"

"Maybe when you exercise you should try squatting differently and stretching your knees beforehand." she interjected.

"No, it's not just when I'm exercising it's in general just when–"

"Oh. Then here's what I would suggest..."
I wanted to put her on mute and just have her listen to me entirely. Maybe she got the hint because when I finally mentioned the patches she was listening.



I was waiting for her to tell me it was eczema like an itch begging to be scratched. I think my mom was thinking that too. Nummular eczema was what she called it. A skin condition in which coin-shaped rashes or sores appear on the skin that may spread, ooze, itch, and crust over. Part of me was relieved to have finally known after two months. Manju was 90% sure it was nummular eczema but told me to visit the dermatologist to be sure. She put me on an over-the-counter cream, Hydrocortisone, and with that the appointment was over. Just when I thought it started, it was done. Just as the invader made me feel foreign in my own skin, that doctor's office echoed that.

After Dr. K left, I whispered to my mom. "I want to switch doctors,"

"You haven't even given her a chance." she pleaded.

"That was her chance."

November
I used the new cream regularly. The itching stopped and I thought something was actually working. My heart lifted and just for a moment I thought this wouldn't be a burden anymore. Just for a moment I thought I could finally wear my skirts and tanks again.

Weeks went by and nothing happened. I didn't see any visible improvement. The invader made sure its new house had stayed the way it wanted. It put up a fence outside and continued to take over my property. This house of mine was now owned by something else.

December
When I first met Kevin, my dermatologist, he seemed very nonchalant. I guess you would be if your patient only had dry patches. He held his iPad in one hand and asked various questions regarding my infection.

"So, I see Dr. K has said it's most likely Nummular Eczema. Interesting." he pondered.

I squirmed around on the padded bed as I tried to give accurate accounts of what I had been observing for months now. In the back of my head, I just wanted him to say it. Just say I have eczema already.

I stared down at my gown. I couldn't get past how breezy it was, barely staying together with a thin, plastic ribbon. It was wrapped tightly around my waist, just ready to unravel and burst. I felt like the ribbon in that moment only I was brimming with anticipation. I still had the gown on since earlier when the nurse took an abundance of invasive photos of the patches. My mom just watched, holding on to all of my clothes in the corner of the room. Kevin pulled up those photos and along with that a diagnosis.

Tinea Corporis, or more commonly known as ringworm was what he called it. 'Disgusting' I thought. Kevin assured me that it was not actual worms inside me. Not that I believed there were worms, but nice to know, I guess. But regardless of if there were actual worms wriggling or not something still felt...alien.

Kevin prescribed me Ketoconazole cream to use for two to five weeks. It was a cream meant to evict the invader completely out of my house as if it had never lived there. I imagined putting the eviction notice on the door myself, letting it know its days were numbered.

In hindsight, Kevin didn't tell me much about ringworm. I guess he assumed I had already done my fair share of research about it since I had already had it for months. I did not. Instead, I avoided it. I felt as though digging deeper into the diagnosis would confirm that I have it. I didn't want to admit I had anything, I just wanted it gone. However, there are flaws in that reasoning. How will I know how to fight it if I don't know what it is?

Thanks to Kevin not telling me much about ringworm, I had no idea it was contagious. I think back to all the things I used that other people might have touched. Are they now infected? Did I unknowingly pass this alien along to the next innocent victim? I guess I'll never know the answer.

Weeks went by after my appointment and I tried to stick to the soap, lotion and cream twice a day for two to five weeks like recommended. At first, there was nothing just like the last time. I recalled Kevin telling me if the cream doesn't work, we'd have to take more serious measures like pills, biopsy or even surgery. After two weeks of the cream, I started envisioning doctors rolling me into an operation room and passing around a scalpel, digging into my flesh and forcefully tearing the alien out of my house.

My mom was very skeptical. She was upset that she didn't see any progress after two weeks. She called in my dad to get his opinion. We all gathered around in my parents' bedroom and examined the patches again. My dad sometimes likes to play doctor in our house just because he works in a hospital. However, his job is to fix the equipment that then fixes people, so it has nothing to do with knowing how to actually fix people. But my mom trusts him at this moment and admittedly, I did too. He told us if there's no progress after two weeks then there won't ever be progress using this cream. He said I needed something stronger.

Dance practice was a place that I could escape to. It was a place where I could express myself through movement and be with friends who shared a similar passion. However, it quickly became a place that fed my insecurities. You're constantly looking at yourself in a mirror for hours on end and thinking about how you look in comparison to others. Great for dancing, but not so great for examining your body and all its flaws.

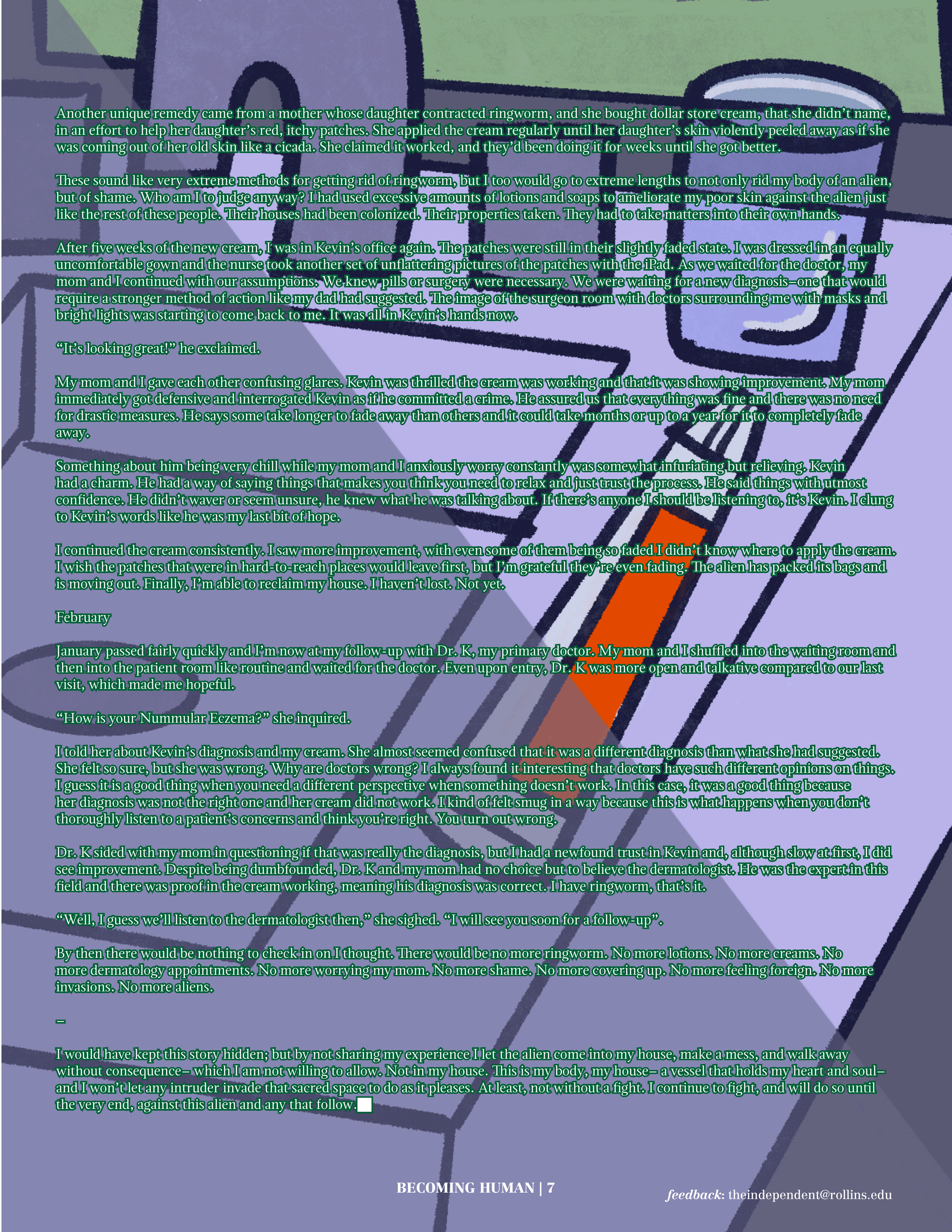
Wearing long sleeves and hoodies to cover up while dancing was very uncomfortable. I convinced myself that I had to sweat through all the hip hop choreography and overheat to keep my skin condition hidden. But looking back, I think I knew deep down no one was really looking and paying close attention, rather I was paying such close attention to myself and what others would think that I didn't believe it.

After three weeks of the cream, that thought of the surgeon room started to sound dramatic. As if lowering the opacity, the patches were starting to fade away. I remember at dance practice, I took off my sweatshirt and as I peered at myself in the mirror, I noticed how small and vague the ringed patches looked. At first, I didn't notice because I view my skin every day, but after observing old pictures I took of the patches, there was definitely a difference. A faint difference. It almost seemed too good to be true. I was hesitant to be excited. What if it doesn't follow through in the end like last time? I heard my dad's voice in the back of my head about needing something stronger. Was this slight fade in the patches really all it could do?

January
The holidays passed, the weather got cold, and I was now skin deep in my ringworm infatuation. Out of curiosity and the sudden urge to know more, I came across this patient forum while researching ringworm. The question was: "how do we know if the ringworm treatment is working?" Short, vague responses of saying "it takes a long time, but the treatment works" were mixed with long, personal accounts of a several month-long battle against what was referred to as a "nuisance" and "annoyance". After reading several stories of frustrated parents whose daughter had to miss school because of a spontaneous ringworm contraction and working adults whose work was negatively affected by their contagious, itching scalp, I started to feel so much better. In a weird way, I was comforted by these terrible stories. The worse the stories got the better I felt, which sounds awful, but made me feel less alone.

Some of the replies were normal responses with many using their fair share of over the counter or prescription creams that ended in -ine, -one, and -ole and watching them shrink down, but some replies implore some rather unique solutions to the problem. One of which I was very tempted to try.

The reply was from chai2023 who had used a blow dryer to heat their ringworm patch up until it became itchy and formed bumps. Then, once it was dried out, they would apply cream and over the next few days wait for it to turn brown and peel off. This sounded somewhat dangerous and like my skin would explode, but I'm glad it worked for them. I would love to know if this method has any long-term effects like scarring on the skin, but I guess I'll never know.



Another unique remedy came from a mother whose daughter contracted ringworm, and she bought dollar store cream, that she didn't name, in an effort to help her daughter's red, itchy patches. She applied the cream regularly until her daughter's skin violently peeled away as if she was coming out of her old skin like a cicada. She claimed it worked, and they'd been doing it for weeks until she got better.

These sound like very extreme methods for getting rid of ringworm, but I too would go to extreme lengths to not only rid my body of an alien, but of shame. Who am I to judge anyway? I had used excessive amounts of lotions and soaps to ameliorate my poor skin against the alien just like the rest of these people. Their houses had been colonized. Their properties taken. They had to take matters into their own hands.

After five weeks of the new cream, I was in Kevin's office again. The patches were still in their slightly faded state. I was dressed in an equally uncomfortable gown and the nurse took another set of unflattering pictures of the patches with the iPad. As we waited for the doctor, my mom and I continued with our assumptions. We knew pills or surgery were necessary. We were waiting for a new diagnosis–one that would require a stronger method of action like my dad had suggested. The image of the surgeon room with doctors surrounding me with masks and bright lights was starting to come back to me. It was all in Kevin's hands now.

"It's looking great!" he exclaimed.

My mom and I gave each other confusing glares. Kevin was thrilled the cream was working and that it was showing improvement. My mom immediately got defensive and interrogated Kevin as if he committed a crime. He assured us that everything was fine and there was no need for drastic measures. He says some take longer to fade away than others and it could take months or up to a year for it to completely fade away.

Something about him being very chill while my mom and I anxiously worry constantly was somewhat infuriating but relieving. Kevin had a charm. He had a way of saying things that makes you think you need to relax and just trust the process. He said things with utmost confidence. He didn't waver or seem unsure, he knew what he was talking about. If there's anyone I should be listening to, it's Kevin. I clung to Kevin's words like he was my last bit of hope.

I continued the cream consistently. I saw more improvement, with even some of them being so faded I didn't know where to apply the cream. I wish the patches that were in hard-to-reach places would leave first, but I'm grateful they're even fading. The alien has packed its bags and is moving out. Finally, I'm able to reclaim my house. I haven't lost. Not yet.

February

January passed fairly quickly and I'm now at my follow-up with Dr. K, my primary doctor. My mom and I shuffled into the waiting room and then into the patient room like routine and waited for the doctor. Even upon entry, Dr. K was more open and talkative compared to our last visit, which made me hopeful.

"How is your Nummular Eczema?" she inquired.

I told her about Kevin's diagnosis and my cream. She almost seemed confused that it was a different diagnosis than what she had suggested. She felt so sure, but she was wrong. Why are doctors wrong? I always found it interesting that doctors have such different opinions on things. I guess it is a good thing when you need a different perspective when something doesn't work. In this case, it was a good thing because her diagnosis was not the right one and her cream did not work. I kind of felt smug in a way because this is what happens when you don't thoroughly listen to a patient's concerns and think you're right. You turn out wrong.

Dr. K sided with my mom in questioning if that was really the diagnosis, but I had a newfound trust in Kevin and, although slow at first, I did see improvement. Despite being dumbfounded, Dr. K and my mom had no choice but to believe the dermatologist. He was the expert in this field and there was proof in the cream working, meaning his diagnosis was correct. I have ringworm, that's it.

"Well, I guess we'll listen to the dermatologist then," she sighed. "I will see you soon for a follow-up".

By then there would be nothing to check in on I thought. There would be no more ringworm. No more lotions. No more creams. No more dermatology appointments. No more worrying my mom. No more shame. No more covering up. No more feeling foreign. No more invasions. No more aliens.

–

I would have kept this story hidden; but by not sharing my experience I let the alien come into my house, make a mess, and walk away without consequence– which I am not willing to allow. Not in my house. This is my body, my house– a vessel that holds my heart and soul– and I won't let any intruder invade that sacred space to do as it pleases. At least, not without a fight. I continue to fight, and will do so until the very end, against this alien and any that follow.

Monsters in the Mirror

Written By Makalynn Prince
Designed/Illustrated by Greyson Baldaro

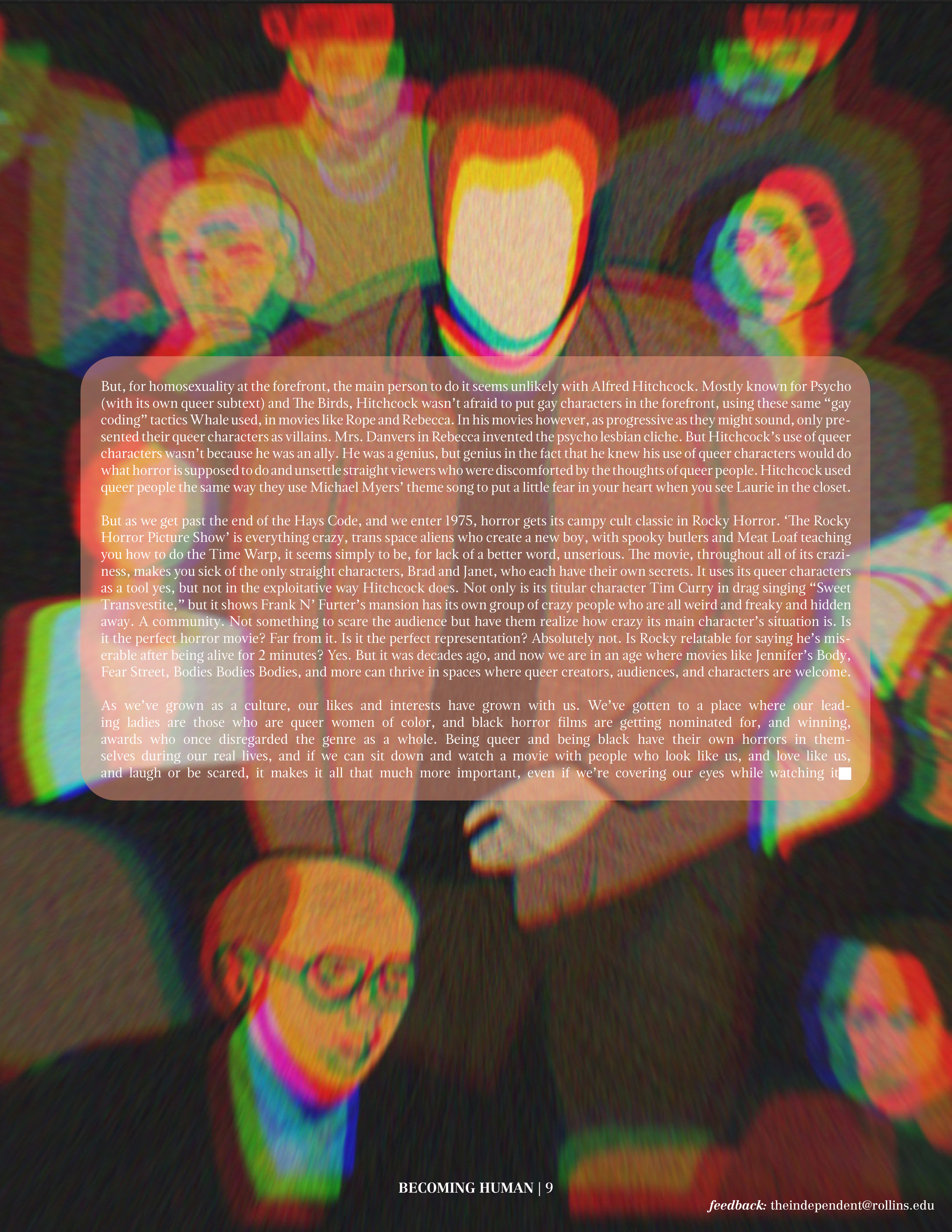
You're sitting at the edge of the bed; the blanket covering you, and your hands covering your face... maybe not your eyes though. No, you want to look away, but you can't pull your eyes from it.

People read and watch horror because of their thrill of the macabre, the want to get scared, or maybe just for the blood and guts. Underrepresented horror fans and creators are a huge demographic yet have to be a place for their own representation. As much as they love it, the genre hasn't always loved them back. Horror, whether it be in film, television, or literature, has been a breeding ground for representation. Black horror has transitioned from Blaxploitation films to Oscar-winners, and we've actively seen the intersection of queer horror as it follows queer liberty. Continually offering the same horror stories over and over are meaningless. Representation and voices allow for different viewpoints that make the genre interesting.

When you think of black people in horror movies, you might just think characters with powerful all-knowing Voodoo, or aggressive 'thug' that's threatening the protagonists, but what really shows is how these depictions have evolved. Moving from thinking of the black character who dies first, to thinking of leading ladies in Jordan Peele films. For decades, black people just couldn't win in a horror movie, unless there was a black director. In the '70s and the turn of the Blaxploitation era, you had black directors making horror movies about black stories, with movies like Abby, J.D.'s Revenge, and most notorious, Blacula. As these expanded with the horror genre, it began the promising trend of white filmmakers including black characters, and things looked bright. It meant you could go see someone who looked like you on a big screen, as white filmmakers were more respected, even in a shunned genre.

But these films weren't exactly kind to their characters. You would either face the Ernie Hudson treatment, meaning you were simply just black, nothing else, or you'd face the horrid token black trope of getting killed off first. It wasn't seen as all bad, by some, I mean, if you got lucky, you'd see and hear Keith David, and it was cool to see Candyman but less cool to see his black trauma written and directed from a white lens. The trope was parodied and satirized but at its heart it just felt mean. If you had a black character, they weren't going to make it to the end, and you'd be lucky if they made it past the first night. Every big franchise perpetuated it, Halloween (1978), Scream, and Nightmare on Elm Street did give us Kincaid but he still died in the long run, even if he was obviously the coolest character there. It seemed unavoidable, even icons to the genre are inescapable from the cliche. Horror legend Tony Todd, known for Candyman, Final Destination, and his very deep voice, in his career has died 24 times (Rolling Stone). Black characters seemed to just be fodder for the scary bad guy to kill, I mean if he can kill this strong black man, he must really be capable, right? But one thing worse, as Robin Means Coleman writes in her book, "Being killed in a horror movie isn't the worst fate one can suffer. Being ignored is." Any black figure is better than none, yes, but simply being there doesn't mean those figures actually have any sustenance. Unsurprisingly, when you give black directors an outlet, you come up with black stories that are important, and at their heart, entertaining. With the likes of Rusty Cundieff and Jordan Peele (Tales from the Hood and Get Out, respectively) you amplify these black voices, and give meaning to black characters. Whether they talk about racial issues, domestic abuse or class struggles, or even vampire killing superheroes like Blade, the movies don't make something shallow with their black characters, they actually mean something. And disregarding just being present in a movie, but having someone there, someone who means more than who they portray on a screen, it transcends.

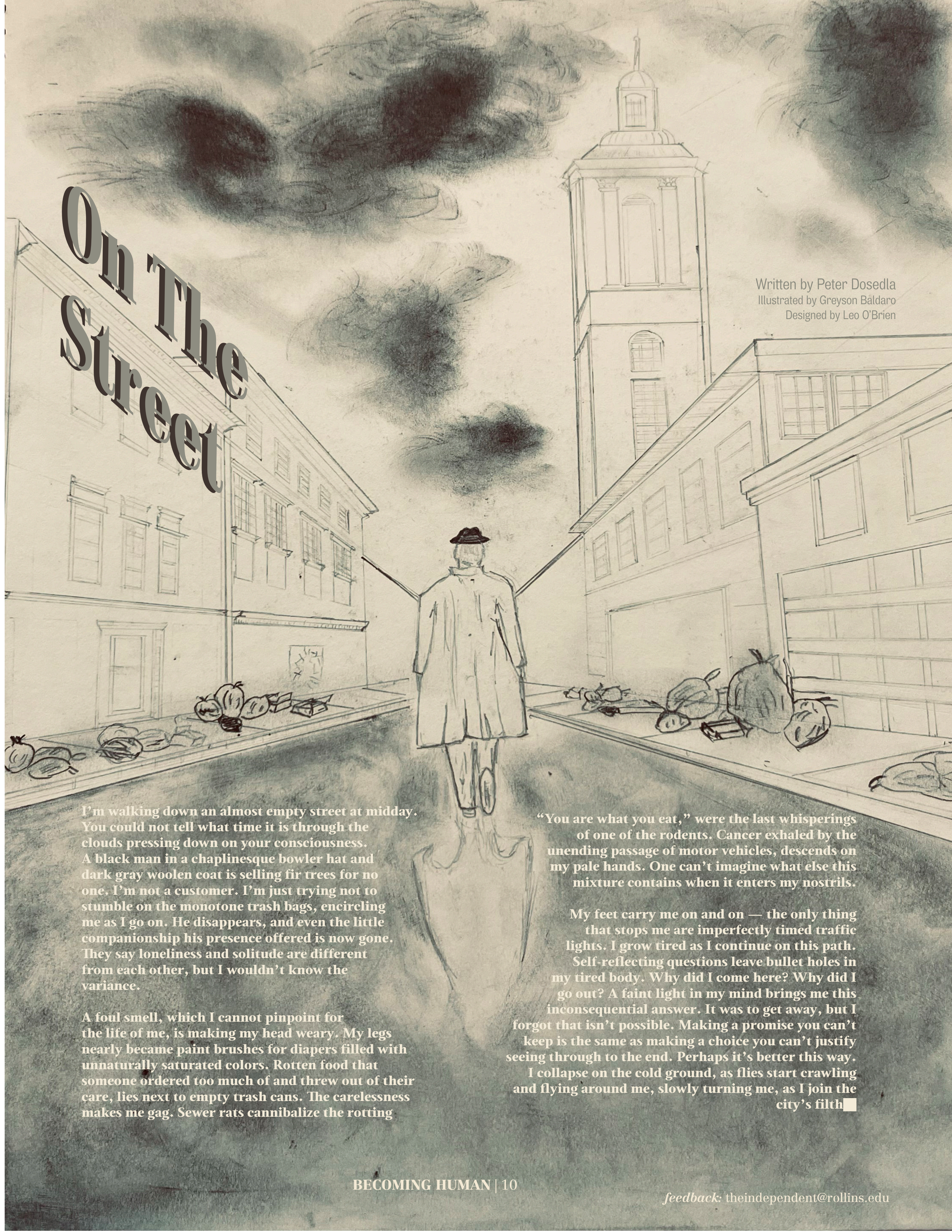
While horror had its social boundaries with portraying black and brown folks, with The Hays Code, created in 1930, there was now a legal requirement to suppress minority groups, including queer people. This code was simply a way to push down things that were thought to be immoral, meaning interracial kissing and homosexuality. But horror as we know it, was formed by creatives making things though the queer lens.



But, for homosexuality at the forefront, the main person to do it seems unlikely with Alfred Hitchcock. Mostly known for Psycho (with its own queer subtext) and The Birds, Hitchcock wasn't afraid to put gay characters in the forefront, using these same "gay coding" tactics Whale used, in movies like Rope and Rebecca. In his movies however, as progressive as they might sound, only presented their queer characters as villains. Mrs. Danvers in Rebecca invented the psycho lesbian cliche. But Hitchcock's use of queer characters wasn't because he was an ally. He was a genius, but genius in the fact that he knew his use of queer characters would do what horror is supposed to do and unsettle straight viewers who were discomforted by the thoughts of queer people. Hitchcock used queer people the same way they use Michael Myers' theme song to put a little fear in your heart when you see Laurie in the closet.

But as we get past the end of the Hays Code, and we enter 1975, horror gets its campy cult classic in Rocky Horror. 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show' is everything crazy, trans space aliens who create a new boy, with spooky butlers and Meat Loaf teaching you how to do the Time Warp, it seems simply to be, for lack of a better word, unserious. The movie, throughout all of its craziness, makes you sick of the only straight characters, Brad and Janet, who each have their own secrets. It uses its queer characters as a tool yes, but not in the exploitative way Hitchcock does. Not only is its titular character Tim Curry in drag singing "Sweet Transvestite," but it shows Frank N' Furter's mansion has its own group of crazy people who are all weird and freaky and hidden away. A community. Not something to scare the audience but have them realize how crazy its main character's situation is. Is it the perfect horror movie? Far from it. Is it the perfect representation? Absolutely not. Is Rocky relatable for saying he's miserable after being alive for 2 minutes? Yes. But it was decades ago, and now we are in an age where movies like Jennifer's Body, Fear Street, Bodies Bodies Bodies, and more can thrive in spaces where queer creators, audiences, and characters are welcome.

As we've grown as a culture, our likes and interests have grown with us. We've gotten to a place where our leading ladies are those who are queer women of color, and black horror films are getting nominated for, and winning, awards who once disregarded the genre as a whole. Being queer and being black have their own horrors in themselves during our real lives, and if we can sit down and watch a movie with people who look like us, and love like us, and laugh or be scared, it makes it all that much more important, even if we're covering our eyes while watching it ■



On The Street

Written by Peter Dosedla

Illustrated by Greyson Baldaro
Designed by Leo O'Brien

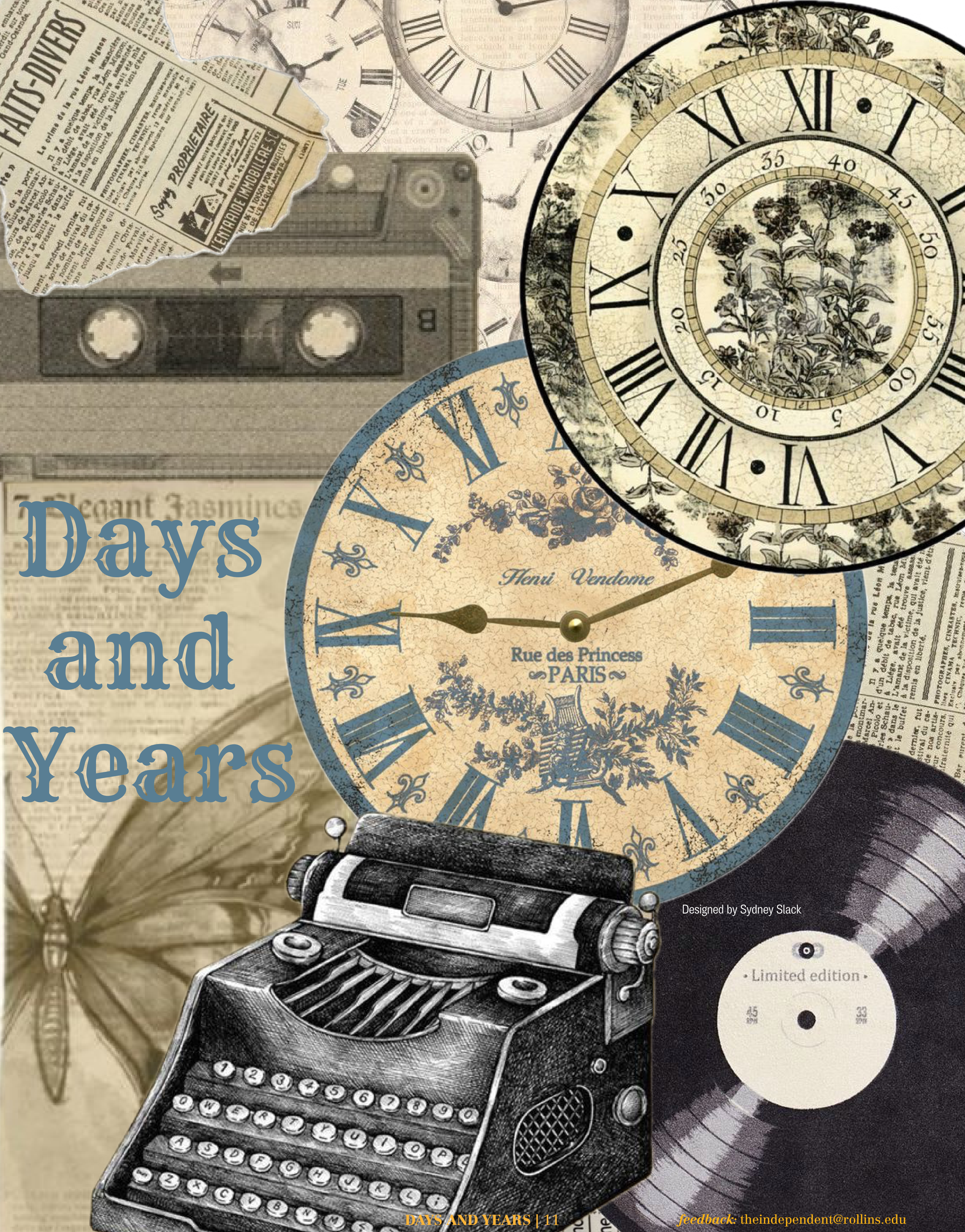
I'm walking down an almost empty street at midday. You could not tell what time it is through the clouds pressing down on your consciousness. A black man in a chaplinesque bowler hat and dark gray woolen coat is selling fir trees for no one. I'm not a customer. I'm just trying not to stumble on the monotone trash bags, encircling me as I go on. He disappears, and even the little companionship his presence offered is now gone. They say loneliness and solitude are different from each other, but I wouldn't know the variance.

A foul smell, which I cannot pinpoint for the life of me, is making my head weary. My legs nearly became paint brushes for diapers filled with unnaturally saturated colors. Rotten food that someone ordered too much of and threw out of their care, lies next to empty trash cans. The carelessness makes me gag. Sewer rats cannibalize the rotting "You are what you eat," were the last whisperings of one of the rodents. Cancer exhaled by the unending passage of motor vehicles, descends on my pale hands. One can't imagine what else this mixture contains when it enters my nostrils.

My feet carry me on and on — the only thing that stops me are imperfectly timed traffic lights. I grow tired as I continue on this path. Self-reflecting questions leave bullet holes in my tired body. Why did I come here? Why did I go out? A faint light in my mind brings me this inconsequential answer. It was to get away, but I forgot that isn't possible. Making a promise you can't keep is the same as making a choice you can't justify seeing through to the end. Perhaps it's better this way. I collapse on the cold ground, as flies start crawling and flying around me, slowly turning me, as I join the city's filth■

feedback: theindependent@rollins.edu

Days and Years


Henri Vendome
Rue des Princess
PARIS
FAITS-DIVERS
Limited edition
45 RPM
33 RPM

Designed by Sydney Slack

Rather The Wait

Written by Belle Wallin
Illustrated by Leo OBrien
Designed by Cece Fernandez

And so I lifted my gaze to find the birds I had heard singing

But I did not find them.

Instead, I found that the edges of the sidewalk were made of old cobblestone

From where its ancient inconvenient beauty had been concreted over

When had the leaves fallen off Old
Ben’s Oak tree to crunch beneath
my feet?

Apparently fall had started a month
and a half ago.

It looked like something out of a
vintage magazine.

That sky, I don’t think I’d ever seen
it that blue.

Then again,

I don’t remember the last time I
looked at the sky.

Or the clouds; the patchy gray and
white silk veils that cover the sky
like a modest lady waiting. Peeking
her eyes around the dressing cover
to spy upon a maid dealing with her
gown.

I think the birds started flying,
I saw them. But only after I had
noticed the chrysanthemums
growing in patches of worn grass;
People love taking short cuts.

Chairs on the lawn I remember
telling myself I would sit and
study with the sun on my face.

I have since resigned
myself to the dank and
dusty library fourth
floor.

The window is a
sore excuse for my
viewing pleasure. I
don’t look out the
window anyway.

Generalities of the world around me floated in the picturesque
landscape.

Pretty trees, soft clouds, worn grass, birds chirping.

You’ve…I’ve heard it all before. The poet painting

A picture of serenity that you know isn’t real.

So rather than looking around and being surprised by the serenity around you,

Wait.

Wait for it to come to you.

Wait, so you may go looking out into the depths of your soul for some finite beauty

That the world will ignore because they see you everyday

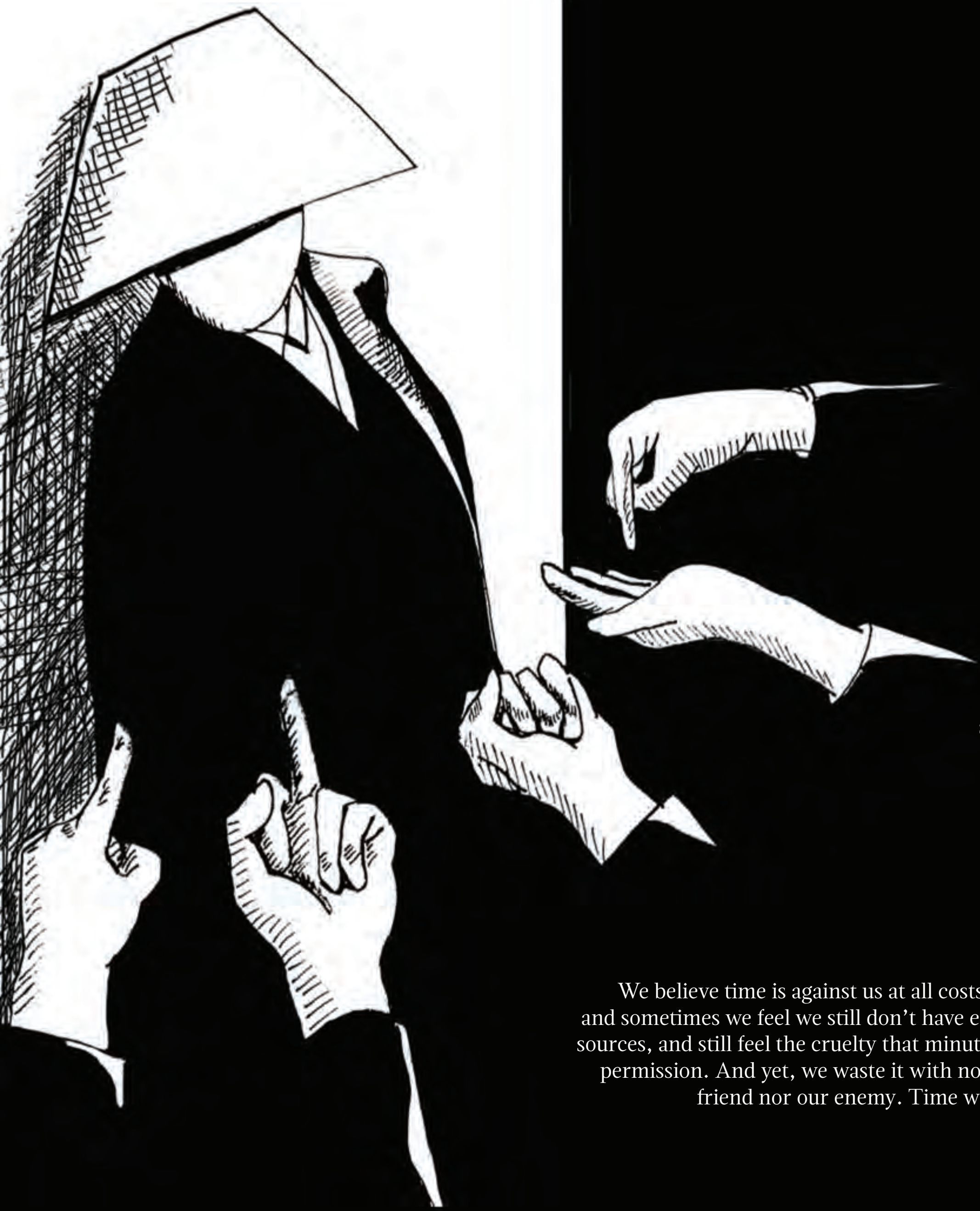
And take you for granted.

Because complacency, my friend, is the depression of imagination

and the optimism of fools ■

Mortal Eyes

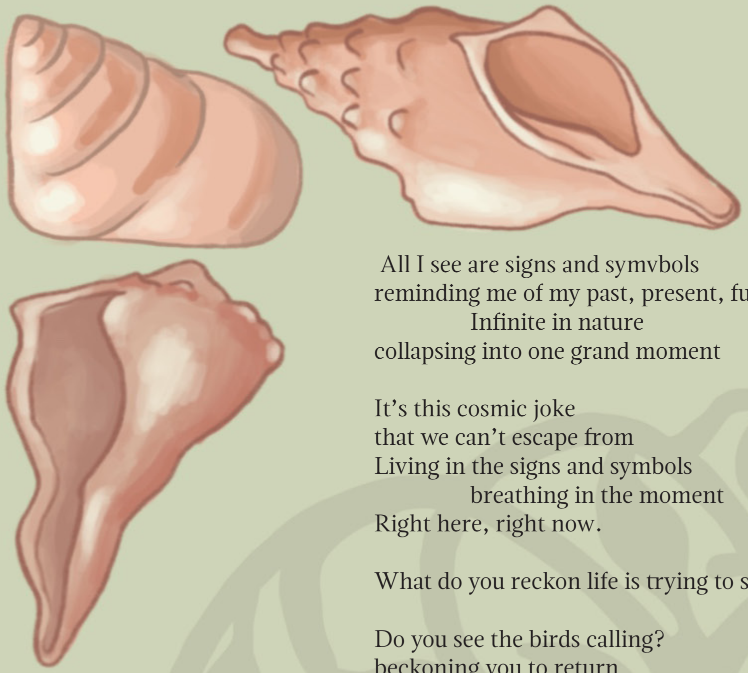
Illustrated by Katya Campos
Designed by Sydney Slack



Time
is
demanded,
and Time is
crushed. Time is
cruel and not enough.
Time is against us and leaves
us behind. Time is forever and
historically dies. Time is wasted and
still survives. Time is not for the Mortal
Eyes.

We believe time is against us at all costs; we search for it throughout the day, and sometimes we feel we still don't have enough of it. We demand time from all sources, and still feel the cruelty that minutes and seconds keep going without our permission. And yet, we waste it with no consideration that Time is neither our friend nor our enemy. Time will survive and become history.

Time is the one thing no mortal or human being has been able to control ■



What do you reckon life is trying to show you right now?

Written by Pia Hernandez
Illustrated by Leo Obrien
Designed by August Bostick

All I see are signs and symvbols
reminding me of my past, present, future
Infinite in nature
collapsing into one grand moment

It's this cosmic joke
that we can't escape from
Living in the signs and symbols
breathing in the moment
Right here, right now.

What do you reckon life is trying to show you right now?

Do you see the birds calling?
beckoning you to return
To a state of awareness
you forgot existed?
Way in the back of your head,
in there,
Something you forgot you've resisted?

The leaves,
in their intricate details and patterns
Whispering to you that
within
There is a world to be explored
full of spirals and lines and swirls
Patterns yet to be recognized

What do you reckon life is trying to show you right now?

The sea, in her waves
tormenting, delicate
Never consistent yet always the same
the paradoxical nature of her existence

What do you reckon life is trying to show you right now?

A sense of yearning you always had
it's fulfilled inside
And everything around is a reminder to check in
with the one who cried
I cannot hide anymore

the true bliss is not in ignorance
Rather, accepting the truth
and the divine lesson carried along
Not a burden to hold,
but an enlightening mold.

It's this cosmic joke
That we can't escape from
All I see are signs and symbols
Reminding me of my past, present, future
Infinite in nature
All collapsing into one grand moment

What do you reckon life is trying to show you right now? ■

Spirit

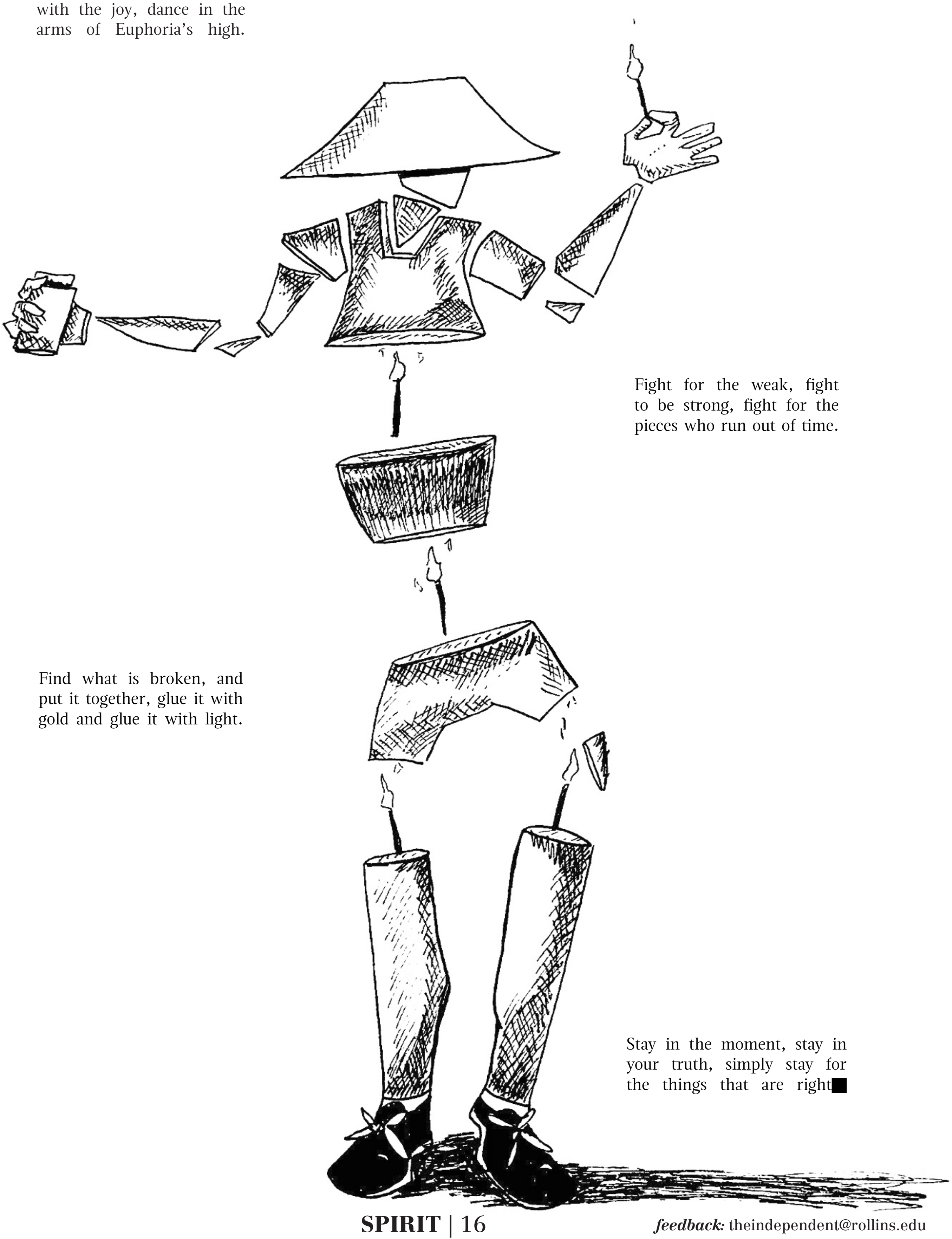
Photographed by Leo OBrien

Euphoria

Illustration by Katya Campos

Designed by Peter Dosedla

Dance with the pain, dance
with the joy, dance in the
arms of Euphoria's high.



Fight for the weak, fight
to be strong, fight for the
pieces who run out of time.

Find what is broken, and
put it together, glue it with
gold and glue it with light.

Stay in the moment, stay in
your truth, simply stay for
the things that are right■

feedback: theindependent@rollins.edu

How to Visit a Mental Hospital

Written by Anonymous

Illustrated by Greyson Baldaro
Designed by Sydney Slack

The first time one of my siblings had to leave was on my sixteenth birthday.

My brother James is an amazing cook. He creates culinary treats that none of us have ever tried or thought to try. Strawberries rolled in white chocolate and basil sugar, grilled cheese sandwiches on Krispy Kreme donuts, deep-fried Milano cookies (that last one he kept for himself). On my sixteenth birthday, he had agreed to make me one of my favorites—a homemade pizza with fancy cheeses and balsamic vinegar. But when it came time for dinner, my parents ordered Domino's, and I held back tears wondering where my big brother was.

If you love someone who is in a wellness facility, like a hospital, or a residential treatment center, then you know how strange it can be. To see someone you love so hopeless that they become a danger to themselves is painful enough before worrying about the stigma and confusion that comes with seeing them committed. I have been through this twice, once with my older brother, and once with my younger sister. Both times, it struck me how unreal it all felt. It seemed wrong that something so big could happen in my life and the rest of world just kept spinning. Through these experiences, I learned some things. Now I know how to visit a mental hospital, without needing to be admitted myself.

The first thing you need to know is that, while many of these places are flawed, they are made with the intent of healing. They are not prisons or old-timey insane asylums. There are no mad scientists or Joker-style villains, especially not in the facilities for young people. The patients there are just kids having a hard time and trying to get better. Many of them experience enormous growth there. In fact, James and I connected for the first time in years while he was staying at a youth wellness center.

In my experience, there are two kinds of facilities. The first is the kind my brother visited. It's a lot like a boarding school, with classes, and roommates, and communal meals. Patients there are administered their medications, if they have any, by the staff, and participate in group activities, like sports and art. They may work with a one-on-one counselor and a support group. Patients in these wellness centers are given more trust than in other places. They might be found relaxing in a shared lounge area or playing in the game room.

Of course, there are still rules. Patients are searched for possessions that could harm them. They cannot have shoelaces, and I recall shaving your legs is a privilege given with supervision. There are visitation days for families, sometimes unsupervised. Anyone who wants to leave must go through a thorough process beforehand. Patients could try their luck making a break for it, but they might live through a story I recall my brother telling, of a petite therapist who chased down a patient and tackled them to the ground.

Hospitals are different. My brother refused to tell his psychiatrist that he would not hurt himself, but my sister threatened to stab herself in the throat. Different people; different needs. The place that she stayed was nothing like the wellness center my brother was in two years prior. I remember green walls, and fluorescent lights, and Sara complaining about aggressive staff members. My parents and I would take a long drive, stopping at the same gas station on the way there and the way back. I remember we put all our things in lockers separated from the waiting room by glass doors. We would sign in, then sit at a round plastic table while we talked to my sister about how she was doing.

The practical part of visiting a mental hospital can be intimidating. Going through their security, turning over IDs and cell phones. Gifts needing approval before delivery. This will probably not be the hardest part of visiting your loved one in a facility like the one my sister lived in. The hardest part, for me, was seeing her.

Self-harm often looks one way in movies and TV—a teenager takes a razor and draws short horizontal lines across their wrists. Maybe they breathe a sigh of relief while blood beads on their skin. Real self-harm can look like that. My brother has fresh red lines on his forearms regularly. For my sister though, it was not scars on her arms. It was holes in her calves and shins where she had poked herself with pens and pencils, then scratched and peeled the wounds. It was friction burns from erasers on the backs of her hands.

The term mental hospital carries a lot of weight with it, but if you grew up like I did, that weight may be a relief. After all, you spent most of your life seeing your siblings in pain. Maybe they hurt you as well. Maybe, like me, you insisted your sister needed help she did not seem to be getting, and when she finally did it was almost too late. Now, with your loved one far away, the weight you are carrying is different. Instead of it surrounding you, it is one big block. You pull it around behind you—sometimes the screech of it dragging on the floor scares you. And you worry that others are staring at it, trying to figure out what it is. Still, this weight does not get to sit on top of your chest. It weighs you down, but it cannot suffocate you.

When my sister left, I wanted it known: I did not miss her.

I wanted her to be healthy, happy, and safe. But I did not want her home. You might read that and think I am an awful sister, but the truth is that while mental illness might not be contagious, it is infectious. It infects families, friendships, partnerships. It demands the full attention of those around it. Normal everyday problems take a backseat. Anything not life-threatening must be a lesser priority, because the alternative is dangerous.

When my sister left, there was finally space in my life, and in my head, for me to be as broken as I needed to be. If you are the sibling of someone in a mental hospital, here is my advice; embrace the pain. Lean into it. Cry, rage, scream.

Find a safe person, like a therapist or a counselor, and fall apart. It is easy to forget that you have undergone something traumatic too. Acknowledge that and then prepare yourself—you are in for a very long road.

You might choose to visit your sibling, or you might not. If you do, know that showing up matters. You are giving your sibling one more reason to keep waking up in the morning, taking their meds, and doing the very hard internal work that will eventually bring them home.
There is a reason that my sister showed me her wounds, unprompted, and my brother refused to say he would not hurt himself. They need to be seen. They need someone to understand how bad the situation is. Your showing up says, I see you are in pain, and I am not leaving.

If you choose not to visit your sibling, you are not a bad sibling. You are not a bad person. You are not selfish, insensitive, or weak. What some people fail to realize is that people who do not care about their own lives often do not care about the lives of those around them. By the time my sister left, our relationship was hanging on by one angry emotionally abusive thread. Shouting matches, stupid fights. Sara threatened to kill my dog, stuck knives under my bedroom door, and all before she was twelve years old. People in pain sometimes cause pain in the people around them. You may not be ready to act as emotional support to some who hurt you. Take the time you need, heal, and do what you must do so that you do not wind up in their shoes.

Mental illness is a painful topic, but the places we go to experience healing do not need to be frightening. Oftentimes, they can be the site of reconnection for families. Regardless of how your visit goes, this can be a pivotal time in your life, so embrace the hurt, and make room for joy. There is more to come. If you want to visit a mental hospital without becoming a patient there, remember that your mental health is important too, and your experiences matter ■

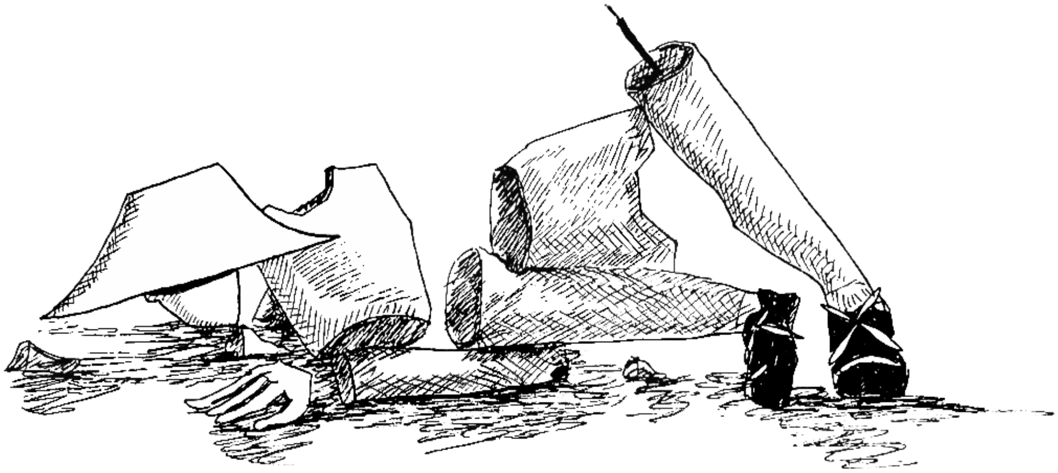
Enervate

Illustration by Katya Campos

Designed by Peter Dosedla

There is a time when the sun stops shining and the rain stops falling. When the wind stops hissing and the trees stop living. Life is no longer the same. We wait for something exciting, something marvelous, and when it appears, it comes and goes unnoticed because our hearts have grown blind. They say the grass is always greener on the other side, but how can that be, when colors desaturate the farther we see, and the brightest details remain within reach.

So how long do we wait; how far do we go? How long do we stay enervated?■



SHE / WE

Illustrated by Gabriela Estrada

BLESS YOUR DAUGHTER

Written by Aaliyah Hummer-Furbet
Illustrated by August Bostick
Designed by Sydney Slack

who hears half of her classmates screaming “your body, My choice” during lunch, and the other half fat shaming, flat shaming, and relentlessly hating on girls’ bodies.

Bless your Daughter who entered the realm of unrestricted internet access in her formative years. who watches Pewdiepie burst with disgust at girls’ bodies that aren’t up to his ideal, who watches Pewdiepie burst with disgust at her body.

Bless your Daughter who was taught that girls aren’t meant to enjoy sex. who was taught that coercion is not only acceptable but is a part of sex.

Bless your Daughter, who wears rose-colored glasses the size of bowling balls. who only wants to feel loved.

pray for your daughter who hears her president saying “grab ‘em by the pussy” and overhears her brother repeating the commands ■

REST IN PEACE, JOSSELI BARNICA

Written by Aaliyah I. Hammer-Furbert
Illustrated by Leo OBrien
Designed by Cece Fernandez

and Bless her four year old Daughter.

on the hospital bed, she grieved the loss of the baby she's carried for 17 weeks.

she grieved her dream of having two children, her dream of giving her daughter a sibling.

it was then that the doctors recorded a miscarriage—

in progress.

Legality governing all bodies, the doctors followed their legal obligation to wait for the heartbeat to cease before releasing Josseli's uterus: risking deadly infection.

Rest in Peace, Josseli Barnica

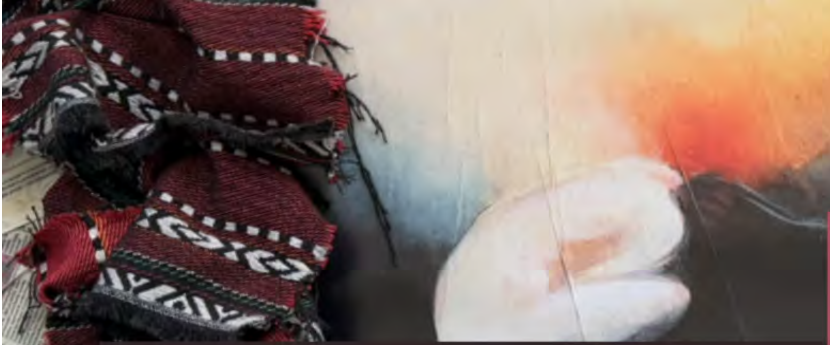
Who for 40 hours begged the doctors to help her go home.

Whose Daughter harbored her mind while bacteria harbored her uterus.

Rest in Peace, Josseli Barnica

Who carried a death sentence while carrying her future child.

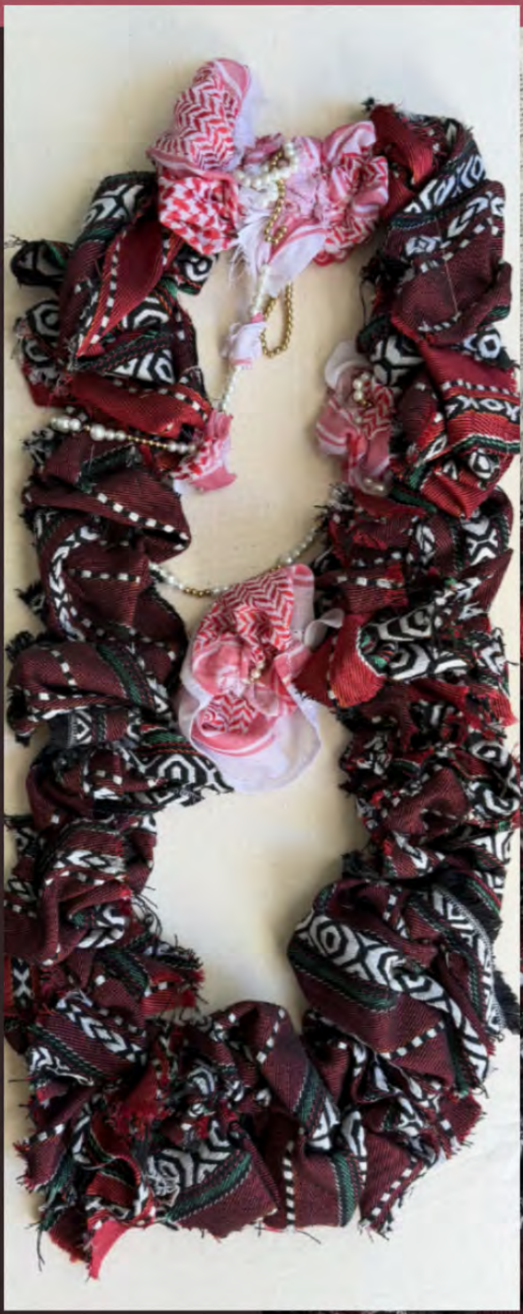
Rest in Peace, Josseli Barnica ■



Dignity & Balance

Visual Art by Jude Naser

Illustrated and Designer By Cece Fernandez



Dignity

The center of the first piece, Dignity, is an untitled painting by Layla Al-Attar. My interpretation of this artwork is that it illustrates the internal struggle of a woman being worn down by the oppressive darkness of war around her, yet she still emits light, embodying resilience and strength.

The title is inspired by Laura Bush’s 2002 speech, which justified the “War on Terrorism” when she stated, “The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.” This highlights the overall irony of the West, which positions itself as advocating for women's rights despite engaging in actions that have led to further violence and marginalization. Dignity invites the viewer to question who defines the dignity of women and at what cost.

Capturing the notion of confinement and restriction, I used traditional Sadu fabric to create a portal-like barrier. The intricacies of the weaving illustrate the nuance of Arab culture and how viewing it as a Westerner differs from viewing it as an Arab. The frayed edges of the Sadu mirror how fragile cultural heritage is when faced with destabilization. It feels as though everything is falling in on Layla Al-Attar's painting, with the Sadu clinging to the artwork for protection—just as Arab culture attempts to shield women, even as Western wars destroy both.

Balance

The second piece, Balance, emerged as a progression from the first, building upon the same Sadu portal. In this work, I introduce Kutra roses, symbolizing the balance of femininity and masculinity. These roses gently strengthen the portal, representing interconnectedness.

The draping of pearls and gold beads further deepens the narrative, drawing from my Kuwaiti heritage. Pearls, once a primary source of income through pearl diving, represent resilience and the rich history of my culture. Gold, traditionally worn by women, symbolizes not only beauty but also financial freedom and empowerment.

Through this piece, I explore tradition, identity, and the interplay of masculinity and femininity, which guard the fortitude of the portal. Balance builds upon Dignity by reinforcing the strength within cultural heritage—demonstrating that even in fragility, there is resilience

Musing on Muses

Written by Alessia Prenda
Photography by Peter Dosedla
Designed by Leo O'Brien

Respectful representations of women are often viewed as a modern novelty considering how so many female statues have been treated throughout history. Take, for instance, Juliet, a symbol of how the youngest among us can fall victim to violence and petty divisions. Her countenance in fair Verona is varnished in the most vulnerable of places. Fingers stretch out for luck—but tell me, what luck did the Bard afford her?

I suppose "luck is a lady"
And to "conquer" a woman is
to "get lucky," diminishing her
choice in the matter
As so many claim, women are
"unpredictable", "unstable",
"a roll of the dice"
So, they reason, to have a
woman in power is unwise
And yet...

In the old temple of Athena, towering on the Acropolis, stood six marble women: caryatids. In place of common columns, they stood tall. Strong, steady, worthy of forming the foundation of such a significant space. A space dedicated to a female deity. Not only powerful, but the wisest of them all. Known for strategy in battle juxtaposing the senseless bloodshed of man.

Dotting the space were korai. Young women, fully clothed might I add, as opposed to their exposed male counterparts the kouroi, served a much more noble purpose than supposedly lucky breasts. They were there, not for ogling, but to demonstrate the inherent feminine nature of such a reliable place in a land full of earthly tremors.

So…is it truly a mere modern development to consider giving female representations in art the respect they deserve? Is that such a "radical" notion? Or is it simply a matter of raising the standard?

SEARCHING
FOR JUSTICE
AW

Illustrated by August Bostick

feedback: theindependent@rollins.edu

In Tutto Il Mundo
In Tutto Il Mundo
In Tutto Il Mundo

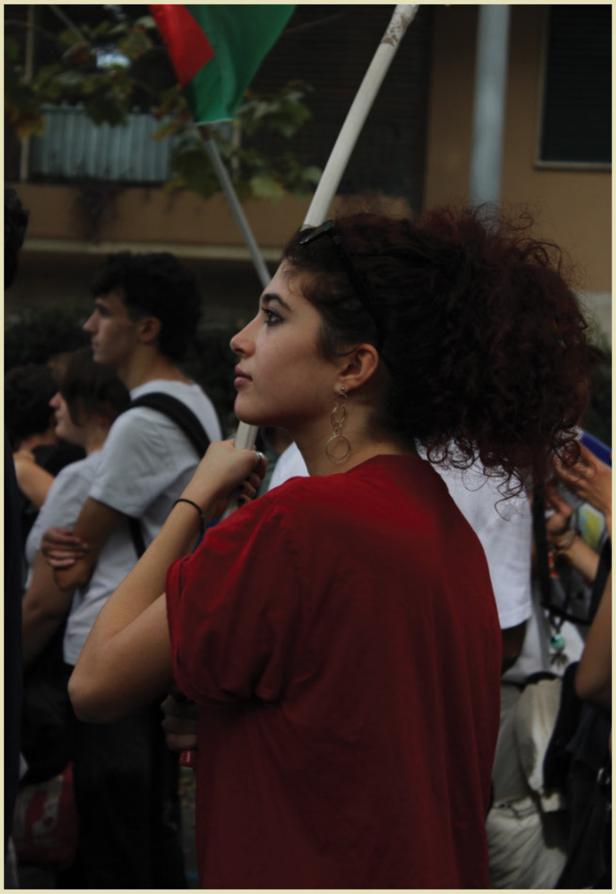
Photography by Juliana Diab

Designed by Peter Dosedla

Through this photographic series, I set out to illustrate the unifying nature of world issues and protesting. have lived in many places, including in Birmingham, Alabama, Orlando, Florida, Amman, Jordan, and Abu Dhabi in the UAE, and now Rome, Italy, and have been to protests in most of them.

During this year, Palestine has been a large issue that activism groups have finally taken on. When I set out to study abroad in Italy this semester, I expected people in Italy to not know or not even care about what was happening in Palestine.

Yet I was proven wrong when I stumbled upon multiple protests on this topic. This protest I took photos of was high school students walking the streets. They shut down multiple waking people up and changing bus routes. Despite the language barrier, I could still see the passion and determination in their chanting and marching.



Protesting is so similar in such a wide variety of places and unifying for people all over the world. Even in Italy I still felt like people were fighting for my people. People are sensitive to people's feelings, and I feel like in these upcoming years people have started to see the Palestinian people no matter where they are or what language they speak. These photos illustrate just that■

Forgotten Stories

Written by Liv McCoy
Illustrated by Leo OBrien
Designed by Greyson Baldaro

Preface

Your teacher excitedly brings up that you will be reading *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author. You are excited because she is excited. You are reading this 270-page novel in 5 days which doesn't seem like a lot at first. But every page is ripped, balled up, and stuffed down your throat.

54 pages in

Your curious wonder quickly shifts to first-hand trauma. The secret burials bring up your own buried traumas, some new and some old.

108 pages in

Choke Nigger
Drop Dead Nigger
No matter how necessary the n-word is to the plot. It still feels like acid trying to go down your throat. But your mouth fixates on it and tries to spit it out.

162 pages in

Clayton Smith almost escapes. Just like how we almost escaped racism, sexism, and other forms of hate. Yet you fill with anxiety at a PWI. Because you know the truth. Because you are living the truth. Racism, sexism, colorism, and supposed microaggressions feel more like MACRO-aggressions, which are all supposed to be hush-hush because Rollins is oh- so- so Liberal. But all the -isms still exist just hidden in forgotten stories by forgotten people.

216 pages in

You feel the worst has passed. High School education has failed to prepare you in how deep and ugly black trauma is, and how it always gets worse. When Big Griff was taken out back, his hands were chained on each side by iron shackles. His body hanging, from the trees, was lashed to death. His body was left mangled and bloody. Buried like he was nothing. Forgotten like he was nothing.

270 pages

Today there is a quiz.
Your mind passes over every word you can remember and all your thoughts begin to erupt in chaos. The quiz asks one question: What's the real name of Elwood Curtis?
Your mind is silent for a second before you come up with an answer.
The grade matters. Your thoughts do not matter.
The book is never referenced or talked about again.
The Nickel Boys slips through the cracks and is shipped off to the forgotten place.
But for you, the words are left like an aftertaste you can't get rid of, even weeks later■

feedback: theindependent@rollins.edu

BLESS OUR FEARFUL CHILDREN

Written by Aaliyah Hummer-Furbet

Illustrated by Cece Fernandez
Designed by Sydney Slack

who ask, “how can we stop bad
guys from getting guns?”

who have weekly drills on how to
hide when the bad guy wanders
into their school.

bless the souls that were forgotten
once they were released from the
womb

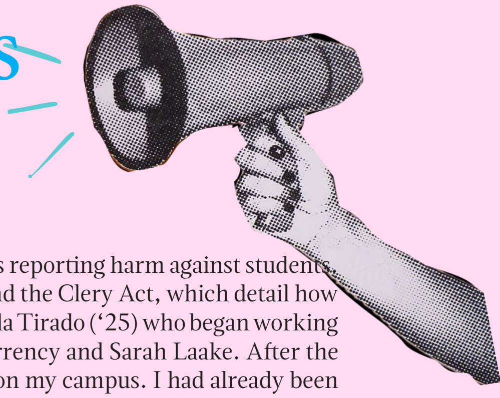
who hopelessly jitter on the bus
ride to school

hoping they’re not riding to their
own doom.

Bless Our Fearful Children

trepidation is ingrained in their
young hearts ■

A Look into Peer Educators



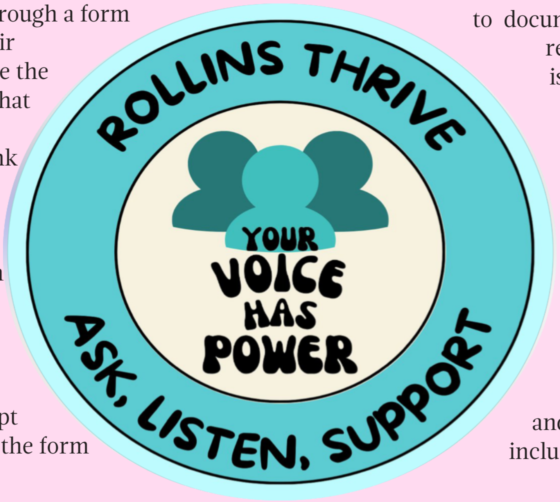
Written by Mary Rust

Designed/Illustrated by Gabriela Estrada

In August of 2022, the campus community received multiple emails notifying recent Title IX incidents reporting harm against students. Concerned for the safety of my campus, I went to a roundtable meeting to learn more about Title IX and the Clery Act, which detail how institutions navigate interpersonal violence and incident reports. When I arrived with my friend Gabriela Tirado ('25) who began working in the Title IX office, it was only us two and two staff whom I would begin to work with, Heather Surrency and Sarah Laake. After the meeting, I realized how learning about Title IX and the Clery Act made me want to make an impact on my campus. I had already been passionate about violence prevention, protecting sexual assault survivors, and the major lags in the legal system when it came to these issues. That same day, I became involved in THRIVE, originally Rollins Violence Prevention. THRIVE, or The Healthy Relationship and Interpersonal Violence Educators, is a volunteer group that partners with Rollins' Title IX office to impact campus culture through peer education programs on sexual violence prevention, healthy sexual practices, and building a campus culture of respect and consent.

When I first joined the group, there were a few students involved already. These included the founder, Capri Gutiérrez, who graduated in 2023. But the idea was still fresh, and many students seemed uncomfortable seeing our tabling events surrounding topics like domestic violence, stalking, consent, relationship red and green flags. Today, the group has grown to ten active members and the campus has grown not only excited but also curious about our events like the popular Consent Carnival and our yearly informational panels on topics like the intersectionality of sexual violence victimhood.

I wanted to interview some of my peers through a form to document our strengths and weaknesses as a group and also as a campus. Using their responses will hopefully be a needle in the direction of our campus to illuminate the issues we face regarding interpersonal and sexual violence. To expose the issues that directly affect students, we direct responsibility onto students and faculty to change these issues. It can also help student organizations like ours to think about collaborative solutions to affect change.



For this project, I gathered responses from seven members of THRIVE. ranging from freshman to seniors with different experiences throughout their time at Rollins. Each of the members notably are involved in multiple in parts of student life; they each balance different club organizations, majors, minors, and leadership roles outside of THRIVE. To make their responses cohesive, I will provide the question prompt and then their exact responses from the Forms survey in order of each response to the form including my own responses and put their initials to mark their individual answers:

First and Last Name, Pronouns, Major, Year:

M.P.: "Madison Proctor, she/her, Biochemistry, first-year."
S.C.: "Sophia Cassa, she/her/hers, English, Senior."
H.M.: "Hannah Marmolejo, She/her/hers, Exploring/Theatre Arts, Freshman."
G.T.: "Gabriela Tirado, she/her, Political Science & Philosophy double major, SWAG minor, senior."
A.H.: "Aaliyah Hammer-Furbert, she/they, English and Psychology Majors, SWAG minor, 2027."
R.D.: "Ruby Duggan, she/her, Sociology major, Sophomore."
S.R.: "Sylvie Reveley, She/her, Molecular biology and biochemistry, first year."
M.R.: "Mary Rust, she/her, English and Political Science double major, American studies minor, senior."

When did you join THRIVE? How long have you been in THRIVE?:

M.P.: "I joined THRIVE in early September of 2024 and have been a member for almost a full semester."

S.C.: "I joined THRIVE in my early sophomore year (so I have been in it now for 3 years)."

H.M.: "I am a new member of THRIVE joining this year. I joined with the intention of being able to teach my peers about different ways to learn and protect themselves not only against sexually based crimes but potential unhealthy relationships."

G.T.: "I joined THRIVE August of 2022. I've been in it since my sophomore year."

A.H.: "I joined THRIVE in the fall of my freshman year. I've been in this organization for a year now."

R.D.: "I joined THRIVE in the spring of my freshman year, spring 2024"

S.R.: "I joined Thrive this year! I have been in thrive for 3 months now."

M.R.: "I joined THRIVE in August 2022 or the beginning of my sophomore year."

Have you been through THRIVE training (both full days of the weekend training)?:

This training is a two-day series that prepares THRIVE members to educate their peers and begin to equip them on topics like sexual violence prevention, toxic relationship dynamics, communicating Title IX and the Clery Act, bystander intervention, reporting practices, and much more. Members are expected to repeat the training to remind themselves of these topics and practices and learn from other members as they discuss with one another.

M.P: “No”
S.C.: “Yes”
H.M.: “Yes”
G.T.: “Yes”
A.H.: “Yes”
R.D.: “No”
S.R.: “Yes”
M.R.: “Yes”

What were some takeaways from THRIVE training, if you attended?:

S.C.: “Everyone in our group is so passionate about the work we do. Additionally, there is still a lot of work to be done. When we look at the statistics for how many people are harmed, on not only our campus but in the world around us, it is saddening at how common it is.”

H.M.: “One of my biggest takeaways was the amount of work and statistics that tends to go unnoticed. A lot of students on campus just know what reports are sent out by Rollins, but there is so much more happening on our campus that isn’t necessarily talked about.”

G.T.: “How systems of oppression facilitate sexual violence and affect whether people report. How to respond to a disclosure made by a student.”

A.H.: “A major takeaway from THRIVE training was realizing that, although gender is a significant component of sexual violence, it’s not the sole factor. Rather, the issue of sexual violence stems from a combination of intersecting power dynamics—such as race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, nationality, ability, etc. Marginalized communities are particularly disproportionately harmed, yet their stories often go unheard in mainstream narratives. Understanding this layered reality is crucial for creating inclusive, effective approaches to address sexual violence.

I also learned a lot about the Clery Act, the process behind timely notifications, and how the Title IX Department works with the survivor before sending out the email.”

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with The Independent

R.D. “I gained an awesome new perspective on identity, barriers, and privilege. “

S.R.: “After completing the THRIVE training, I left with newfound information and knowledge regarding healthy relationships, communication, consent, and boundaries. My biggest takeaway was lessons about healthy communication and the importance of setting boundaries/respecting other people’s boundaries.”

M.R.: “It helped me understand how violence develops and happens societally through different systems of oppression and the different levels of violence. I also learned more about the Clery Act and what Title IX offices are required to do when someone reports an incident and the different factors that may hinder them from reporting or going to the police.”

Why did you want to join THRIVE?:

M.P.: “To contribute to a safer campus environment by establishing a support network for anyone on campus experiencing Title IX-related experiences.”

S.C.: “I wanted to make an impact at Rollins. I knew with a group of passionate people that was possible.”

H.M.: “I wanted to join THRIVE to be able to be a part of a community that shared the same values as me, but also help me learn how I can teach others about the different ways to avoid sexual violence or what steps to take after.”

G.T.: “Because I am passionate about eliminating gender-based violence and helping survivors of sexual violence reclaim their power.”

A.H.: “My decision to join THRIVE was driven by seeing the lasting impact of sexual violence and how trauma can persist long after the experience. This highlighted the power of support, education, and advocacy. Through THRIVE, I aim to push a culture of consent, respect, and bodily autonomy within our campus community and beyond it. Another reason I joined THRIVE was because I am passionate about spreading awareness surrounding sexual pleasure, especially for women, and highlighting that coercion is never consent. By being part of THRIVE, I hope to challenge harmful misconceptions and contribute to a more empowering and respectful dialogue around sexual health and autonomy.”

R.D. “I am passionate about high quality sex education for everyone.”

S.R.: “I joined THRIVE to help create a safe and respectful

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ROLLINS VIOLENCE PREVENTION
LIFE IS BETTER WI

community where students are informed and supported in their relationships.”

M.R.: “I joined THRIVE because I care deeply about advocating for victims of gender-based violence and sexual violence, so that we can as a campus limit and prevent future violence.”

What programs have meant the most to you?:

M.P: “The most significant program I was involved in was the Consent Carnival. This event was special to me because it was one of the first times I had experienced a college campus openly discussing and promoting safe and healthy sexuality among students.”

S.C.: “Consent carnival, that program was my baby. When we first started it, faculty and student orgs were all hesitant. No one knew if it was “too much” for this campus. The first year we held consent carnival I was begging people, “ just trust me”. I knew our campus needed it. Our first year, we had 10 partners and about 150 students. This year, we had 28 partners and over 300 students attended. To see the impact, it makes on this campus, to have organizations that usually did not partner with us before engaging in dialogue surrounding the topics we strive for at THRIVE, was something I always envisioned. To go from last year, where no one knew, “what it would look like,” to having faculty endorse consent carnival and students knowing who THRIVE is and the resources we provide; that was our goal, and I can safely say we went above and beyond. Now, with the foundation set up for Consent Carnival, I can’t wait to hear about what happens next year. I know it is in good hands with this group. “

H.M.: “I think the Consent Carnival had the biggest impact for me because it had so many people from different backgrounds all working forwards the same goal. I really enjoyed being thrown into a difficult task to create something fun and educational.”

G.T.: “’Intersectionality: Constructing Equitable Relationships’ panel discussion was really significant because we researched and organized it all together. The Clothesline Project was very powerful because a lot of students shared how impactful it was. The Consent Talks were also very important because we got to talk to freshmen.”

A.H.: “The Intersectionality Pannel and Restructuring Freshmen Orientation!”

R.D.: “Tabling, as well as the consent carnival and sexual assault awareness fair”

S.R.: “The consent carnival! I have yet to experience many THRIVE events, so I am looking forward to helping with more. Consent Carnival was in full motion when I joined THRIVE and has meant the most to me because so many people came and supported our event.”

M.R.: “The Intersectionality Panel was my favorite to help organize, because the conversations about sexual violence can still be so limited or seen as taboo, especially when it relates to a person’s identity. I also enjoy the Sexual Health Jeopardy for Freshmen Orientation because it is a beginning step for freshmen to learn about their bodies, consent, and their rights on campus.”

What impact have you felt that you have had at Rollins specifically through THRIVE? Or what impact has THRIVE had on campus?:

M.P.: “THRIVE has strongly contributed to a more comfortable campus where students are less afraid to contact resources in times of need. As well, THRIVE has opened up conversations of consent, healthy relationships, safe sex, and more in an environment in which these topics are less often discussed. This is important in promoting a student culture in which we respect and look out for each other.”

S.C.: “I think THRIVE is a unique group that nothing else on campus is like it. We are resources for students from the peer perspectives but also educators. We also have so much responsibility to continue in furthering our campus culture of consent. Trying to come up with new, creative ways to meet people where they are at within this topic. Knowing that Florida schools do not require sex education in public schools, we have a wide range of people we have to reach on this campus. Not every group has to reach everyone. I think we started that with the Consent Carnival, and we are going to continue it into next semester with some of our creative programming coming up to ensure everyone knows their resources and have proper information about healthy relationships, self-love, safer sex, and consent at Rollins.”

H.M.: “I think the biggest impact I have had has been able to correct and teach people in my RCC what different concepts of Title IX include.”

G.T.: “We have made students feel more comfortable speaking about sexual violence and consent, so I have definitely felt these topics become more destigmatized.”

A.H.: “I think THRIVE has been pretty impactful in influencing the campus culture surrounding sexuality and safe sex.”

R.D.: “Encouraging and popularizing safe sex on campus.”

S.R.: “I think THRIVE has made a huge impact through the Consent Carnival. Many people showed up and learned about THRIVE and information about healthy relationships and safe sex. People continued to talk about this event and THRIVE after. I look forward to participating in more events.”

M.R.: “I think THRIVE has helped people feel comfortable talking about their experiences and discussing consent opposed to how it was viewed when I was a freshman.”

What is campus culture and how has THRIVE had an effect?:

M.P.: “Campus culture is the way in which students and faculty on campus interact and behave socially. THRIVE has contributed to a more open campus culture, in which we fight to remove the stigma on important topics like domestic violence, consent, and safe sex.”

S.C.: “Campus culture is what we at Rollins value and how we execute our values. Looking back at my freshman year to now I have seen an immense switch in what Rollins students see as tolerable. From freshman year, catcalling while driving down the street in front of mills was seen as common. Now, people I feel are adequately prepared with the resources and know that these things are not ok.”

H.M.: “I think campus culture is the way people interact on campus and speak about our school. THRIVE has impacted that by making it somewhat safer and a brighter environment. Being a part of THRIVE helps keep conversations about healthy relationships and healthy sex lives alive on campus.”

A.H.: “To me, campus culture is the overarching shared feelings, beliefs, and values of the college. However, the collective atmosphere may not represent the values of all individuals on campus.”

R.D.: “Campus culture is a culture of normalization and collective views on a subject., THRIVE impacts this by promoting and normalizing conversation around safer sex, healthy relationships and consent”

S.R.: “Campus culture is the ideologies, beliefs and behaviors that the campus community typically shares and accepts. THRIVE works to make sure that these beliefs, ideas and behavior are respectful and considerate.”

M.R.: “Campus culture is how individuals are swayed to act by their peers because of the dominant beliefs and expectations for students to act and not act. THRIVE has an impact because peers can influence and shift each others viewpoints and ideas about certain topics.”

Are there ways that you want to have more of an impact?:

M.P.: “Yes! Having only been a member of THRIVE for a short semester, I look forward to bringing my ideas to THRIVE. I hope to become more involved in larger-scale impact projects as well as spend time engaging with other students at our smaller events like tabling. Most notably, I hope to encourage THRIVE to engage with concerns of menstrual inequity on campus so that we may impact student health alongside social concerns.”

S.C.: “We’ve talked about Yik Yak within our group and how that is both hindering and aiding campus culture. Anonymous platforms allow those to ask questions that they might not ask with their name attached (maybe in fear of “getting cancelled for not knowing”). However, this online anonymous platform also brings those that say heinous things just because they think they can get away with it. I just want to say, asking questions should not be awkward or cause you to fear getting cancelled. You should be well equipped with your resources and information regarding your own body or life at Rollins.”

H.M.: “I want to reach out to different clubs and orgs to be able to teach them and include them in different events. With that, I want to be like some of the senior members and have more contacts within the school.”

G.T.: “I want us to have more variety with our events, hopefully with survivors of sexual assault coming to speak and sharing their stories.”

A.H.: “It would be really beneficial if THRIVE had a bigger impact on covering marginalized identities and how they influence rates of sexual violence and people’s perceptions of it. Additionally, I think we could do a better job of tackling rape myths.”

Pressuring, tricking, threatening

R.D.: “By helping make safe sex more accessible by providing free condoms etc. to students in an anonymous, shame-free way.”

S.R.: “I would like to have more of an impact for the freshman class and incoming students.”

M.R.: “I would like to see more advocacy for survivors of sexual assault through the Title IX Office, because there still are many barriers to reporting or seeking help.”

What are some of the issues with the culture on campus? What would you like changed about our campus culture?:

M.P.: “The most concerning issues with our culture on campus relate to social media presence. While THRIVE and other on-campus organizations have done a great job at improving the status of student life regarding our in-person events, I find social media spaces to still be severely toxic environments. Media platforms like Yik Yak, TikTok, and Instagram should be used to promote positivity and campus engagement, but more often are seen as spaces for spreading anonymous hate and threats. I would love to see a shift in our campus culture transforming these online spaces, if not moving away from them entirely.

H.M.: “I think some of it would include people talking negatively about Title IX because they don’t know all the facts. I want to be able to change this by teaching them what we learn in our trainings and explain everything we try to do and the impact we try to have on campus.”

G.T.: “People still don’t take conversations about consent seriously. There is a lot of victim-blaming too—I would like for this to change.”

A.H.: “Normalization of sexual violence—specifically harassment. Especially harassment of RAs.”

R.D.: “I honestly do just believe that the students’ education about safe sex, healthy relationships and consent is just still very poor. More so because it is something they may not have covered or covered thoroughly enough in high school.”

S.R.: “I have heard many disgusting and degrading comments that were accepted by students. I would like to empower students to know that they can use their voices and stand up against these comments.”

M.R.: “Even though we have events around consent, I think that we could become better at picking who leads those events because it is often seen as a funny topic rather than a crucial part in violence prevention.”

Any final thoughts you would like to share?:

S.C.: “I have seen THRIVE grow from no one knowing who we are, to seeing everyone on campus wear our shirts. I think that says what we value as a campus. I believe that students always valued these things that we work for at THRIVE, they just did not know how to stand up for themselves and articulate it. I think that is what THRIVE contributes to the campus, I would not want to have my Rollins years defined any other way than with THRIVE.”

R.D.: “I wish the school funded THRIVE the way they fund other departments because it feels like we just aren’t valued enough by the school.”

ROLLINS THRIVE
YOUR VOICE HAS POWER
ASK, LISTEN, SUPPORT

While all our campus’ issues and successes are not detailed here, I think that, as a campus, we must become more honest about the quality of our activism on campus. So many students both inside and out of THRIVE are deeply passionate about making our campus a better place to learn and live in. With my four years at Rollins ending, I wanted to leave a piece of my shared experience at THRIVE here. Because while I and many other students may move on to new places, I hope that my time here at Rollins has made an impact. One person cannot be a solution to all of these problems but through our collective efforts I hope that we created change in the right direction.

The Kids Are Alright?

Written by Alessia Prenda

Illustrated /Designed by Cece Fernandez

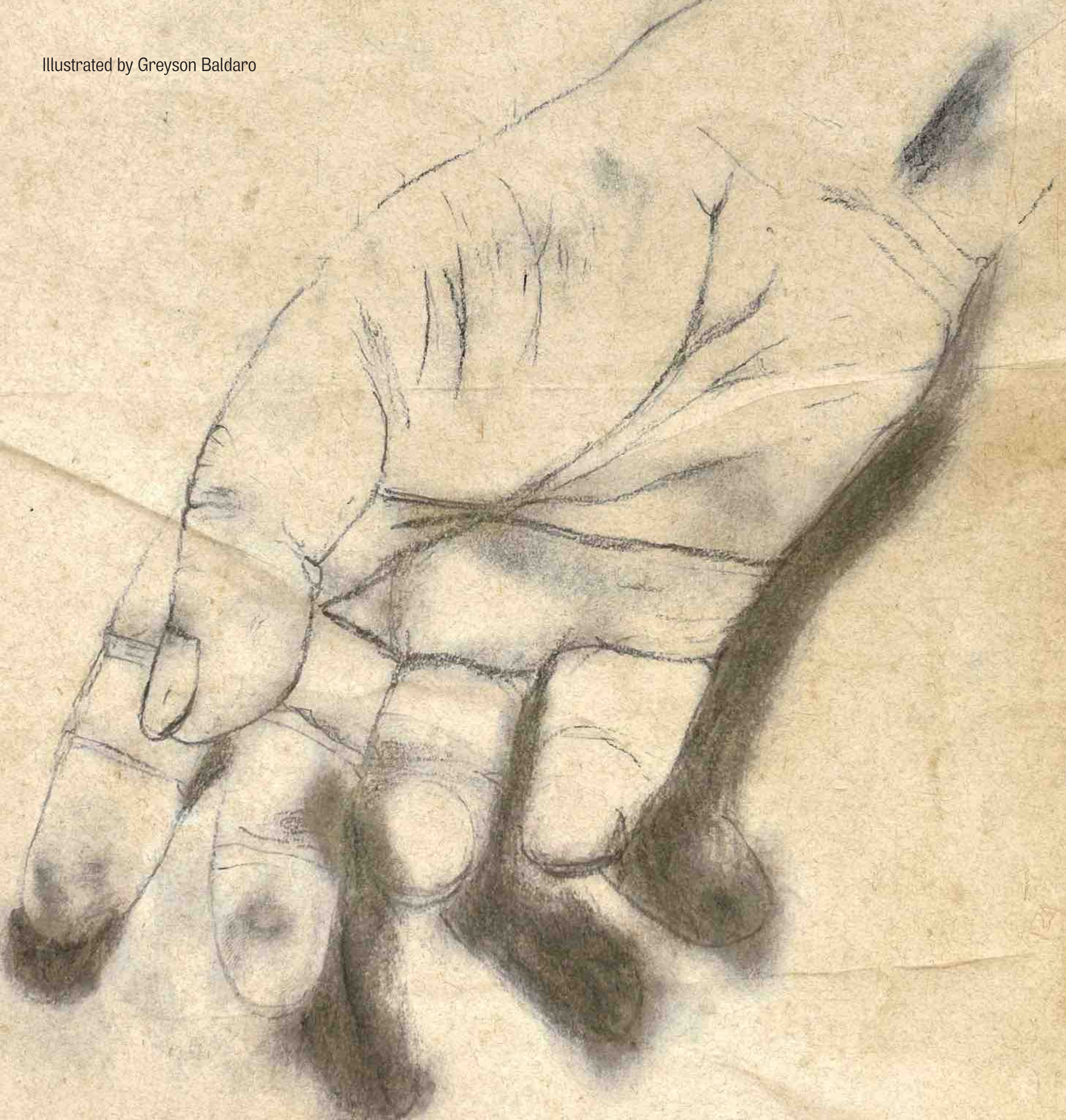
People shrug and say that the kids are alright
Plastering gold stars on the ones they call bright
Pensive kids are labeled exceptional at first
But as they form opinions, things take a turn for the worse
Officials lose their grip as truths are shared onscreen
Unnerved to find that patterns did not go unseen
Protests met with violence; online spaces banned
Banished to the kids' table for taking a stand
The age-old adage says "kids are seen and not heard"
So teaching them real history is deemed absurd
Because you can't go back once the truth is learned
There's more darkness in Witch-Hunters than in women burned

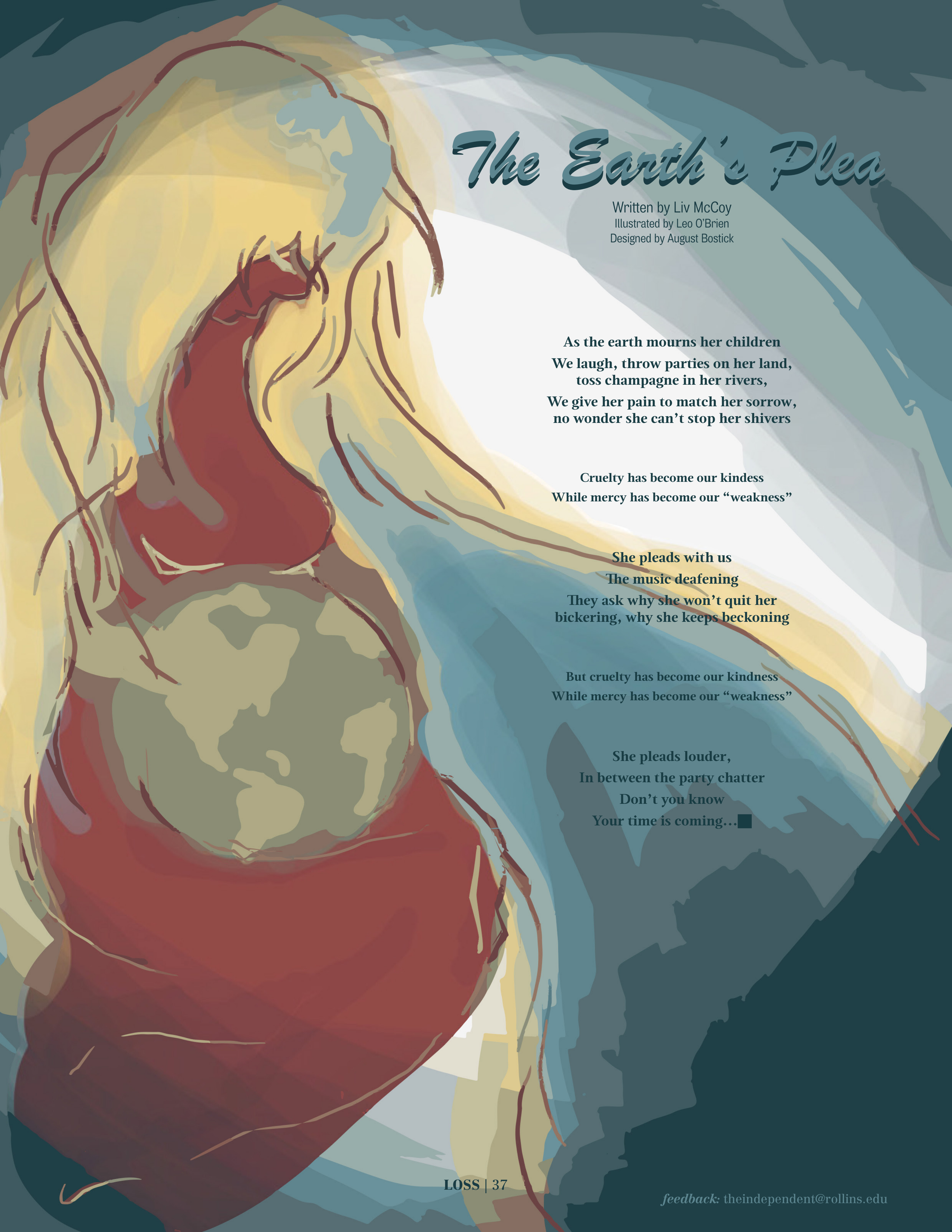
ADULTS
ARE
SPEAKING

If we won't let kids think, we do them a disservice
Ripping books out of their hands, we drag them to the circus
Ringleaders tame lions, serving scapegoat for dinner
Parents scurry past parade floats, seething "sinner"
Hatred for those they don't care to know
Prompts them to loose words that land like arrows
Kids do listen, despite what they think
Without tact, they'll stand on bigotry's brink
Resentment abounds if kids know more than they "should"
Some adults quench flames so little is understood
When the kids speak up, it's said they're full of spite
I'm not so sure they hope that the kids are alright ■

LOSS

Illustrated by Greyson Baldaro





The Earth's Plea

Written by Liv McCoy
Illustrated by Leo O'Brien
Designed by August Bostick

As the earth mourns her children
We laugh, throw parties on her land,
toss champagne in her rivers,
We give her pain to match her sorrow,
no wonder she can't stop her shivers

Cruelty has become our kindess
While mercy has become our "weakness"

She pleads with us
The music deafening
They ask why she won't quit her
bickering, why she keeps beckoning

But cruelty has become our kindness
While mercy has become our "weakness"

She pleads louder,
In between the party chatter
Don't you know
Your time is coming…■

Ancestry

Written by Pia Hernandez
Illustrated by August Bostick
Designed by Cece Fernandez

Pray I hear your silent voice:
In the slow and hushed winds,
In the crackle of the boiling waters,
In the breaths that
f
a
l
l
into slumber,
In the eyes of my mother and father;

Pray I see you, recognize you,
Ages down the line,
So far back,
The familiarity will never cease;

Pray I touch you, hug you,
Feel your embrace,
In the blankets, flavors,
photos and knickknacks;

Pray I remember you,
So your voice shall never be unheard,
Your story never unseen,
Your love never unfelt;

Pray my children
feel
you
through me:
The remembering of where we came from,
The special touch of the uniting thread.

I wish I knew more of you.
It is only in the hands of time
I will understand
to see
you
through me ■

SAMSARA

Written by Pia Hernandez

Photographed by Peter Dosedla
Designed by Sydney Slack

I feel the draught
Of dread,
The unobliged yet prominent laziness of being here
To be commanded and directed without the desire of such!

Take me by my snout and shove me in the gravel,
Make me lose my sense of direction,
Plummet me into the depths of your work,

Meaningless and ceaseless, you are!
My lifeblood excreting for you!
It drips down into your menacing abyss;
I know I will get nothing back from this.
Yet I stay enslaved, enchained unto you.

I long for the moment of freedom.

These weeks are eternal.
The sacrifice is not worth the gain,
It seems, in moments like this.
Maybe the me of tomorrow will "thank" the
h—o—u—r—s
Of excruciating drainage.

And still,
No matter however many morsels of gratitude
My poor self could offer,
These hours are critical moments
Lost!
Of my healing
Of my creation
Of my expression
In these moments I lose myself to you.
And these moments I will never get back.

The never-ending march and turn of capitalism
The wheel of fortune? Please.
In this Kali Yuga age, I desperately hope for my peace.
I want a warm day in the winter months,
I know this cannot be the endgame for me.

My lifeblood extends beyond this,
Past the ghastly faces on Wall Street,
Empty and void of any sun.
My lifeblood gives life and is meant to nurture.
I cannot contain it within me anymore.

My veins are rivers, not pipelines.
My heart is fertile ground, not empty terrain.
My mind is an open field, not a mechanical prison.
I am sunburst with warmth.
I am for the sake of art.
I am everything they claim I cannot be.

Fruitless labor… I may come and bow to you for the lessons you have taught me.

But for now, I live in spite and resentment because of you

Mary and Lazarus

Written by Mary Rust

Designed/Illustrated by Gabriela Estrada

Today was a day of many firsts:

My father lost his dad;

He lost his sister and father;

Both gone within fifteen days;

Buried her to bury him.

I wonder what his last memory of me was.

Did you hear my name and think of her or me?

Mary Ruth Rust, borrowed from my grandmother,

She died when my father was 20.

Did my name haunt my grandfather? Or am I her name's keeper?

He passed with not a soul around.

With no rest, my parents told me.

I spoke with my brother.

He confided, "I could not imagine losing you and then losing dad"

I refused to say that one day his imagination will be real

I hope that a brother would haunt me if one may pass before me

That I could keep one of three near

What a blessed miracle at least,

To have blood next to you as you are born

You were before me, before I was me

And before I cease to be me, you will remain

And I entered Earth before you,

So that you felt welcome here.
Why must we leave one another

Into God's cloak of eternity

To trek to find one another?

God puts us together

Finding the only comfort in our families, our people

Just to make us lost sheep again

I must sound blasphemous

My father would scold me, "Fear nothing"

But oh, how I fear now losing him. Losing my world.

I wonder if God knew what beauty would come from the sin of knowledge

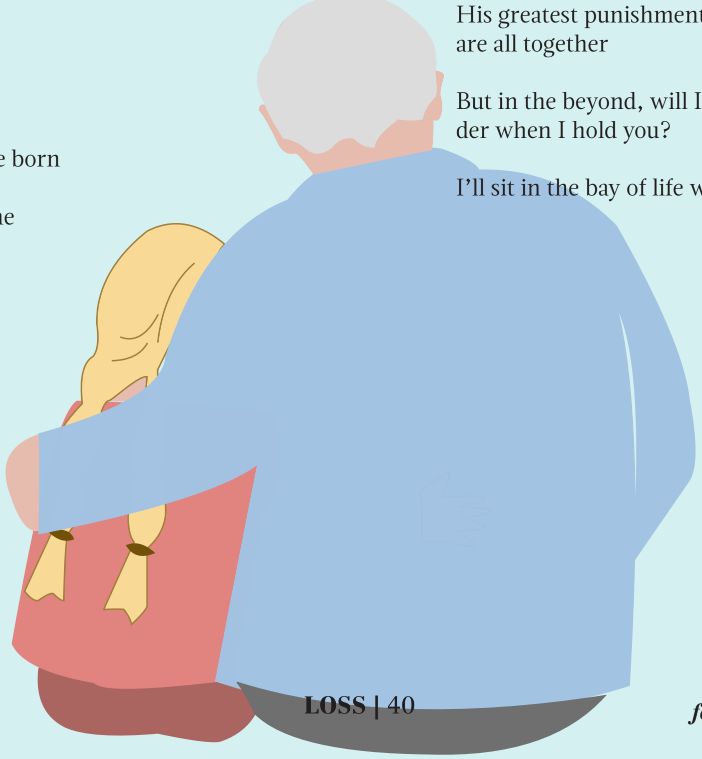
The stories we would weave to hold our humanity together

The tapestries of families long dead and rotting in a forgotten tomb

His greatest punishment is that, in the land of sin, we at least are all together

But in the beyond, will I be able to feel the sun on my shoulder when I hold you?

I'll sit in the bay of life waiting for you all to come back ■



ART IN
EVERYTHING

Illustrated by August Bostick

IT DOES NOT SHINE FOR PRAISE

Written by Alessia Prenda

Photography by Greyson Baldaro
Designed by Sydney Slack

The North Star is known the world over
As a guide, a symbol, a friend
Venerated by the masses throughout the ages
But it does not shine for praise

Nor do any of its neighbors

A multitude of beacons in the heavens
Go without pomp and circumstance
Yet lack does not dull their glow
For they are not in want.

That we on Earth
Cannot see them with the naked eye
Does not mean that somehow
Someone closer would see less

We humans look chiefly at the foreground.

Stars have no way of knowing what we see
I don't believe they would care if they did
A star needs not praise to shine
It need only be a star ■

Diagnoses from a Writer

Illustrated by August Bostick

Written by Sarah Ogden

Designed by Peter Dosedla

My body itches
rhythmically
with syllables
unheard,
a deep pattern
of scratches
their attempt
to spell out words.

My low voice breaks
abruptly
with lines
of poetry,
weary
cords crafting verses
of enjambed
foolosophy.

My stomach flips
one-eighty
with wet pages
slammed flat,
ink splattered
down my cover
in a beg
to recollect.

My spine used to be
rigid
when it still stood
uncracked,
back before it
collapsed
as the weight
of its stack
shifted

feedback: theindependent@rollins.edu

Hegemony and Winter’s Breeze

Written by Aiden Bernstein
Illustrated by Leo Obrien
Designed by Greyson Baldaro

Hegemony

I. All things swept sole away

Frameworks—

the complex ways we know the world
the simplistic manifestations of our lives
the ugliness which causes conflict

The beauty of our differences—

We looked at the clouds
I saw a bunny
You, a crab
How fun to see differences in a whole
We talked, we loved
We looked at the grass
I saw grass
You, grass
The same framework, no differences
We sat in awkward silence

Conflict—
the cause of contention
assert one’s authority
assert the other’s incompetency

The source of pain, of glory—
Prove another wrong
You don’t know what’s true
You gain your glory
Proven wrong
Your framework denied
Your aura diminished

II. A Secret told
The base human instinct
is to feel good
To feel good,
protect your framework
To protect your framework,
enforce it on others

Breed out differences,
feel good,
satisfy that base desire

III. A little Dog that wags his tail
I see such beauty—
such beauty is art

Show me everything—
everything you feel

Tell me more—
more than I know

I hear such beauty—
such beauty is life

I will show you—
show you what I hear

I will tell you more—
more than you knew

Together, we will learn
Learn more than either of us
knew
together

Together,
grow into different people,
different frameworks

Together we will grow

IV. I felt a Funeral, in my Brain

Art breeds togetherness
Togetherness breeds difference
Different frameworks breed conflict
Conflict breeds pain
Pain must be avoided

Banish art, the origin
Beware of censorship
Banish education
of art

V. A great Hope fell

Van Gogh wasn’t real.
Claude Monet’s Mona Lisa,
a surreal painting

The flag—
the only real art

One framework—
Hegemony ■

Winter's Breeze

I. Hibiscus on the Sleeping Shores

The summer breeze
flows through your hair
Through mine,
the water laps at it

Nature's art, so beautiful
Serenity, overwhelming
our being

Solitude, quiet
in our thoughts

Together, all of
us become our
own island

A poem not intended,
but derailed to describe such
moments
Beauty is art, and begets art

A painting of a girl,
solemn faced,
holding flowers,
watching the sun set

A painting of a girl,
solemn faced,
holding flowers,
watching the sun set

Man's art, so beautiful
Solemnity, concerned with the world
Her own thoughts, gouache
Saturated with only her own affairs

Intention set, details unknown
Mental picture inscribed to words
Beauty is art,
and begets art

II. Last Looks at the Lilacs

She saw Art
Ugliness laid out in front of her—
our own creation,
sprawling across our streets

She saw Art
Ugliness she captured in her brain
Decomposed to skeletons
Recomposed to watercolor violence

You saw Art,

it changed you
You see now,
what you had
ignored

You saw Art
You see the pain

that others felt
What were the
causes?
How must you fix
it?

We saw Art,
we acted in it,
we broke it,
we made it

We see Art
We know what we
must do
In us, that part we
don't see—
we will act on it

III. The Idea of Order at Key West

Come now, I will guide you
To a place where you may call your own
You and your kids,
home at last

They kicked you out,
left you with nothing,
told you that humanity was a privilege
One that you lost

Out of touch people, your gods,
decreed that money was more than morality,
caused so much harm,
and brushed off their loss

You worked hard,
provided for who you loved
Their greed cost you everything,
and they said it was yours

But now come, that is the past!
You didn't earn what you got
Now your recompense will come,
and they will get theirs

IV. The Public Square

How sweet, the winds of winter
Cold, chilling our bones
Together we will burn brighter
Signs of change, a flyer
That fruitful sound, fulfilling what we've known
How sweet, the winds of winter

Will you listen to those who are higher?
Oh, what an ugly tone
Together we will burn brighter

Your thick coat, let it retire
Inspired is the cold, grab your stones
How sweet, the winds of winter

We listened—were dragged into this mire
No longer will we be so prone
Together we will burn brighter

Reignite this eternal fire
A revolution no longer shall we postpone
How sweet, the sound of winter
Together, we will burn brighter

V. The Revolutionists Stop for Orangeade

Could a framework cause such violence?
Though, you say you love our differences
Even then, you cause such conflict
Is our pain—your glory—so delicious?

You gave in to your instincts, and feel
happy,
healthy,
whole?

I may be a dog
wagging my tail at hopeful futures
But I saw nature—
its art painted in broad strokes
But I saw art—
Untransmittable emotion bestowed
We were together and we grew

Your framework not so far from mine,
we saw the art
Your framework so far from mine,
you now seek to banish it

Would you thrive in
your hegemony?

Nature—
Humans—
Art—
so beautiful

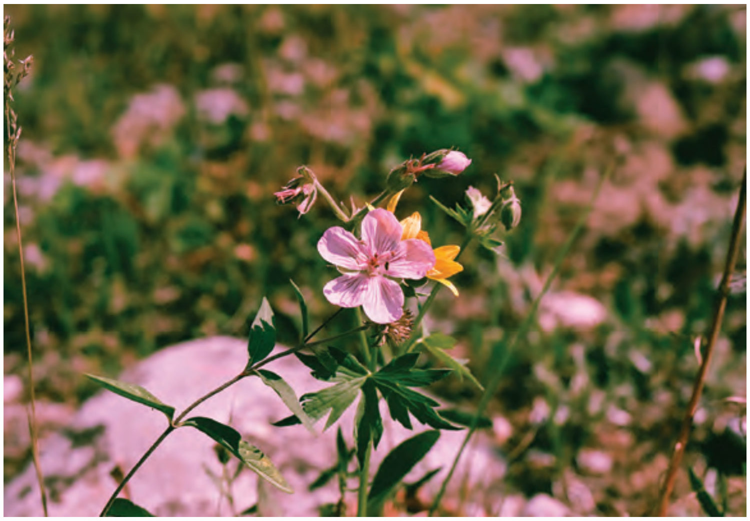
Would that I could write all day and night
To see and know, a virtue I hope to keep
To act on knowledge, a virtue I wish to bestow

Your framework,
incompatible with another
It denies their life
What will be on your receipt?

You would not stand in the cold,
not feel it flow through you
You could not understand another's plight
No, you could not burn brighter

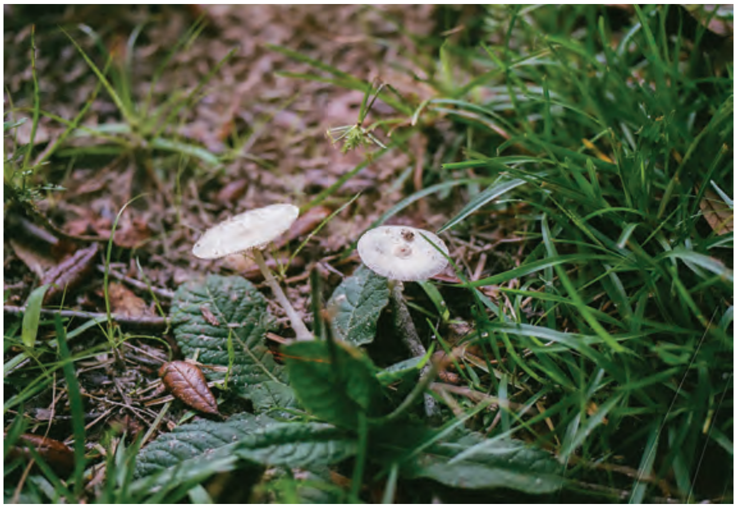
But would you stand with me in
Winter's Breeze?

Pink Flower on the Ledge



Photography by Aiden Bernstein

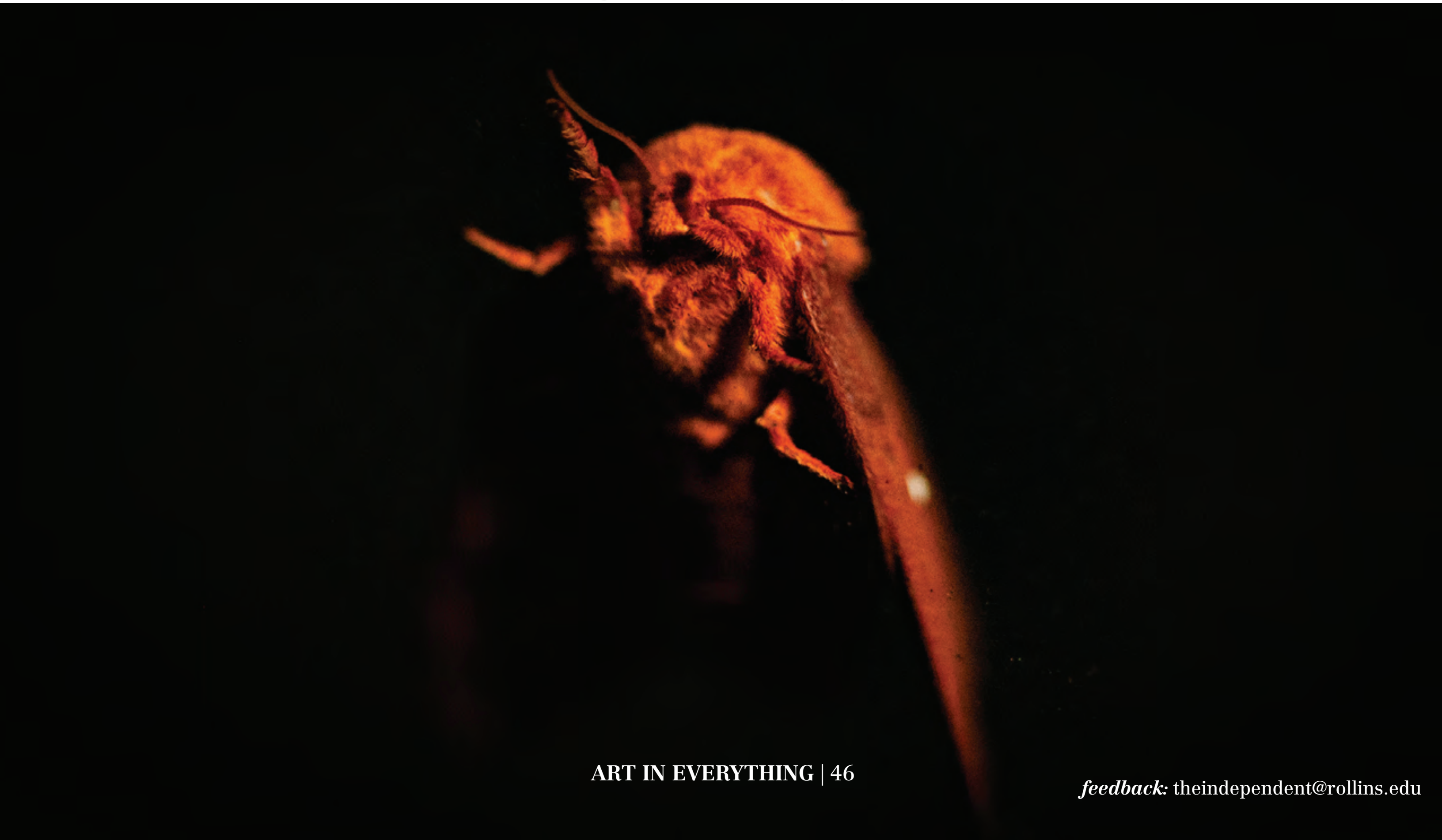
Designed by Greyson Baldaro

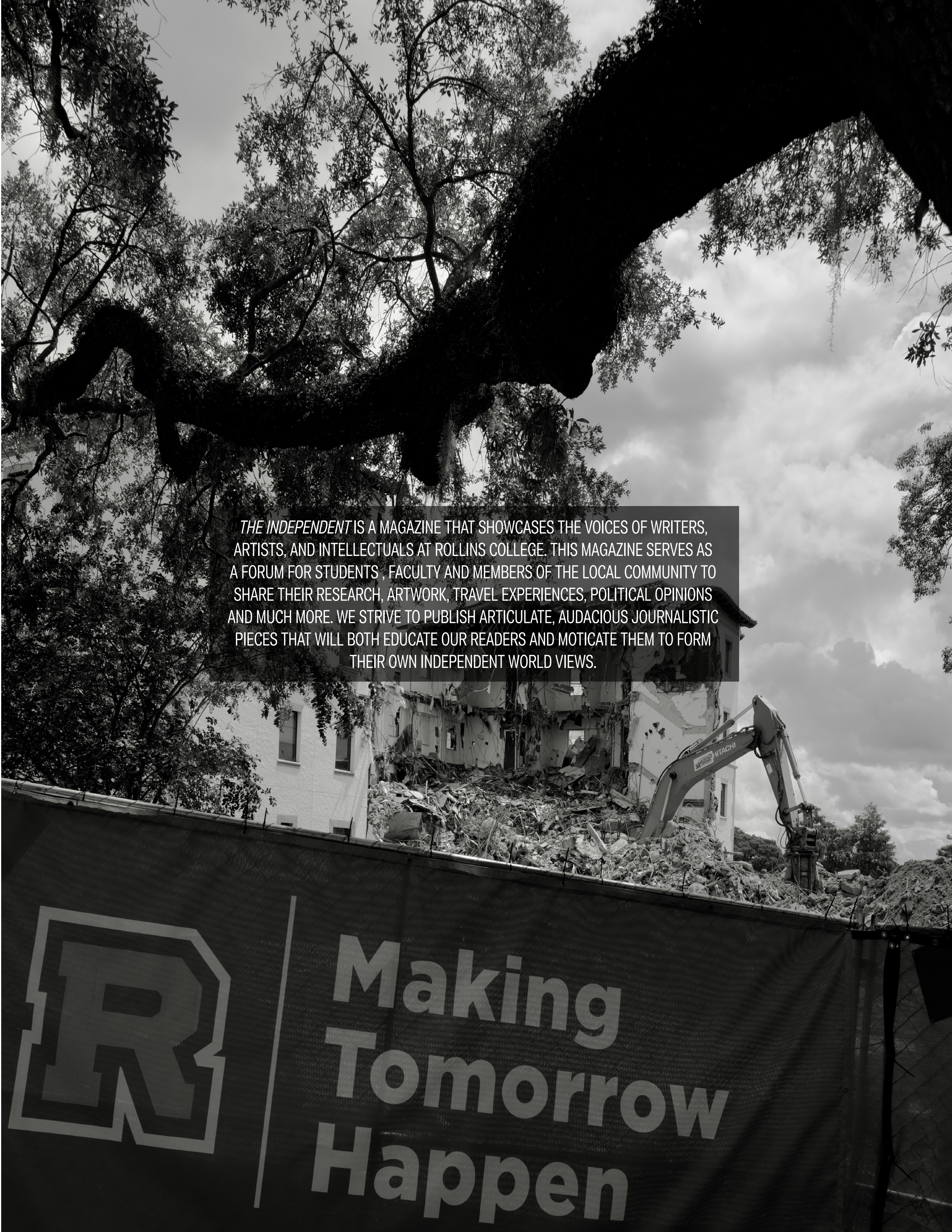


Mushrooms

So many people, myself included, are constantly stressed by the world that humanity has made for itself. There is always something—the constant barrage of harmful legislation, foreign wars, scholarship applications, or the traffic on Fairbanks when I'm trying to get to my dentist on time. Whenever I feel stressed about these things, I find it nice to walk away from these human issues, into nature■

A Stranger My Friend





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